

**Mudanças do Bordado de Etnia Miao
Desde a Segunda Metade do Século XX**

**Changes of Miao Embroidery
Since the Second Half of the Twentieth Century**

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RESUMO

Pretende-se com este trabalho apresentar as mudanças de bordado Miao desde a segunda metade do século XX.

Os temas abordados nesta dissertação incluem a história e as características do bordado Miao; a situação actual do bordado Miao na sociedade chinesa, com o exemplo de Ka Wu, uma aldeia Miao na província de Guizhou, no sudeste da China; a análise dos fatores que trazem essas mudanças desde a segunda metade do século XX e reflexões sobre a autenticidade e desenvolvimento do bordado Miao na sociedade contemporânea.

A observação descritiva é baseada principalmente em dados e informações obtidos através de recursos documentais e trabalho de campo na aldeia Ka Wu.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Bordados Miao; traje; mudanças; cultura material; identidade; globalização; autenticidade; comoditização; turismo

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate the changes of Miao embroidery since the second half of the twentieth century.

The topics addressed in this dissertation include the history and characteristics of Miao embroidery; the current situation of Miao embroidery in Chinese society with the example of Ka Wu, a Miao village in Guizhou province in the southeast of China; the analysis of factors that bring these changes since the second half of the twentieth century and reflections about the authenticity and development of the Miao embroidery in contemporary society.

The descriptive observation is mostly based on data and information obtained through documentary resources and fieldwork studies in Ka Wu village.

KEYWORDS: Miao embroidery; costume; changes; material culture; identity; globalization; authenticity; commoditization; tourism

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Introduction

Costume is one of the essential elements of material culture. Human sciences study costumes in order to comprehend more about life, culture, religion, economics, politics and history of a society. It is, in fact, a message without words for its visibility which, collectively or individually, consciously or unconsciously, identify a certain group or of a certain person. The costume is "... expression, presentation and communication in several instances or way to produce the differentiation of individuals or groups, as well as the interaction between them." (Brandini, 2007: 26) In other words, the utilization and interpretation of costume are deep reflections of social and cultural rules. In dressing up, a person addresses himself and his world. Investigating what it reveals or conceals contributes to our knowledge about the material culture and understanding of the human nature.

Being an important heritage of Chinese culture, the traditional Miao costume, decorated by unique Miao embroidery, is a symbolic icon in Chinese ethnic culture. Embroidery is an important part of Miao traditional costume, appearing generally on collars, sleeves, shoulders, skirts, shoes and so on. The embroidery, fabrics and other decorative materials form the integrity of Miao traditional costume. Actually, Miao embroidery goes far beyond a decorative craft. As the Miao people do not have an official written language before 1905 (Robert, 1987), traditional costume with Miao embroidery has been one of the most important ways to register history, surrounding landscapes, ecology, religion, folklore, customs and traditions over thousands of years. What people now attempt to inculcate in children through pedagogic teaching, based principally in language, had previously been inculcated through material culture and, in this case, through Miao embroidery. The Miao embroidery's unique aesthetics, characteristics and cultural connotations are one of the best representations of Miao's wisdom, which has been past from generation to generation. In a word, Miao embroidery is undoubtedly a valuable treasure in Miao and Chinese folk culture.

In recent decades, with the development of globalization and modernization, China has been undergoing economic growth and expansion to a global market at a scale and pace that are revolutionary in Chinese history. At the same time, Chinese ethnic minorities, including Miao, are acculturated increasingly by the dominant culture, namely by Han Chinese. This is placing great pressure on the ethnic cultural diversity as traditional values and material cultures are being transformed or abandoned in order to adapt to the mainstream. Changes brought by globalization are threatening the viability of local handicrafts and the peoples who produce them. In what Benjamin called the “age of mechanical reproduction”, the manufacture of cultural products suffered a stultifying standardization, as did the consciousness of every member of society. “Culture now impresses the same stamp on everything” (Schein, 2000:15).

In this context, the Miao ethnic group, like many other minorities, is facing a crisis in the inheritance of its traditions, among which stand out the traditional costume and Miao embroidery. According to recent research, more and more Miao people tend to buy ready-to-wear costume instead of making it themselves. Thus, the number of Miao women with good mastery level of embroidery is in a sharp decline and several traditional embroidery techniques are on the verge of extinction.

In this work, I investigate particularly the changes of Miao embroidery since the second half of the twentieth century, namely the period after the foundation of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, when Chinese mainstream culture began to show its great influence on minorities and the modernization and globalization accelerated with the open market policy by Deng Xiaoping. We wonder how was the Miao embroidery before 1950 and how it is at present. What are the changes in the artistic and technical aspects? What are the changes of the utilization of Miao embroidery? What are the changes in the inheritance process? What are the changes of the Miao people’s attitudes towards Miao embroidery? What are the factors that brought about these changes? In the era of globalization, can the

“local” really meet with the “global” by truly sustaining its “localness”?

With these questions, I chose Ka Wu village, a Miao village in the Qiandongnan Region of China, as the place of fieldwork investigation. Based on methodologies of documentary resources, ethnography, participant observation and visual research, namely photography documentary, the dissertation is organized as follows:

The first part describes the theoretical framework, history and characteristics of the Miao embroidery; the second part analyzes the situation of Miao embroidery in contemporary Chinese society through fieldwork in Ka Wu village; the third part probes the factors that bring about the changes since the second half of the twentieth centuries; the forth part proposes reflections about the authenticity and development of Miao embroidery in contemporary society.

Chapter I – Theoretical Framework, History and Characteristics of Miao Embroidery

1.1. Theoretical Frame

Works about traditional Miao embroidery and Miao costume are fundamental backgrounds of this research. It is essential to learn about the history, functions, aesthetics, techniques, cultural connotations of Miao costume and embroidery in order to understand better its changes from past to present.

Since China's reform policies oriented by Deng Xiaoping in 1978, the concept of “market socialism” has been constructed, and the globalization and modernization in China has begun accelerated. Anthropological studies in the nation have revived (Harrell, 2001). Scholars from a range of ethnic groups have been trained in cultural anthropology, social sciences, and interdisciplinary research. These investigators have helped to document Chinese ethnic minority's knowledge and have facilitated cultural exchanges.

Miao's Culture and History (Yang, 1998) is an encyclopedic work of Miao ethnic group, in which Yang introduces the historical relationships between Miao people and other ethnic groups, as well as the classification of Miao sub-groups, their religions, languages, traditions, customs and material culture including Miao costume and Miao embroidery, etc. In the section of material culture, Yang explains systematically the historical development of Miao embroidery since the Qing Dynasty (1616-1912) until 1990s, including styles, patterns, compositions and techniques, compiling hundreds of photographs and pictures of Miao embroidery work. *Miao Cultural Studies* (Jiquan, 1999) is an ethnographic work situated in Qiandongnan Region¹. Jiquan stayed in Kaili city² for seven years and investigated specifically Miao people in this region, offering detailed information of their traditions and customs. In

¹ Qiandongnan Region is a Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture, in the southeast part of Guizhou Province

² Kaili city, capital city of Qiandongnan Region

the chapter of “Religious Spirit of Miao Costume”, Jiquan discusses cultural connotations of Miao costume and embroidery from the point of view of religion and totem worship, put forth the idea that totems bind Miao people together in social groups, and serve as an impetus for the development of civilization. *The Miao Costume in Guizhou* (Li, 1985), *Study of Miao Embroidery Patterns* (Wang, 1994) and *Miao Embroidery Techniques* (Long, 1999) are also valuable works of the early research, which provide solid foundation for Miao costume and embroidery’s background investigation.

Regarding to the **changes and developments** of Miao embroidery, *Miao’s Cultural Changes in Guizhou between 1895-1945* (You, 1997) uses a historical perspective to describe the development of Miao community’s culture before the second half of twentieth century, highlighted the influences of other Chinese folk arts on Miao embroidery, such as Han embroidery. *Guizhou Folk Art Heritage* (Yang, 2006) and *Miao Embroidery Study* (Liu, 2011) introduces the main techniques of Miao embroidery from history record and in contemporary society by detailed explanation of sketch paintings and photos. *The Development of Miao Embroidery Since 1960s* (Gao, 2009) crosses Miao embroidery between past and present, from economic and political perspective to explain the development and changes of embroidery Miao since second half of twentieth century.

Pertaining to **ethnic identity and globalization**, Jonathan (1990) in his work *Being in the World: Globalization and Localization* points out that ethnic and cultural fragmentation and modern homogenization are not two issues or opposing views of what is happening nowadays, but two constitutive trends of global reality. He used the old saying “you are what you eat” to explain that the globalized consumption is an act of self-identification. In today’s society, the material that people produce and use is significant part of the differential definition of social groups and individuals. In his another work *Globalization and Processes of Identity Shifts*, Jonathan discusses the relationships between transformation of the global system and the identity fragmentation, horizontal and vertical polarization

between emergent cosmopolitan elites and increasingly indigenized local populations.

As for **costume and globalization**, *The Fabric of Cultures: Fashion, Identity, and Globalization* (Paulicelli & Clark, 2009) examines the impact of fashion as a manufacturing industry and as a culture industry that shapes the identities of nations and cities, in a cross-cultural perspective within a global framework. *Miao Traditional Costume and Globalization* (Zhang, 2014) is an ethnographic work done in Qiandongnan Region, discusses specifically the situation of Miao traditional costume under the globalization trends. Zhang speculates that, compared to industrialized costume, Miao traditional handmade costumes has been in a endangered status in recent decades. As large-scale international trade overrides the less developed regions, so industrialized clothing making is seemingly swallowing the individuality of the clothing products of small-scale agrarian cultures.

In regard to **detrterritorialization, acculturation and integration**, Mascia-Lees (2010) defines detrterritorialization as “the process by which the cultural, social, and political contexts that affect and define people’s lives cease to be confined by territorial borders, boundaries, and distances”. Xiong Yu in his work *Minorities in Guizhou Province* investigates the interactions and influences between minorities and Chinese Han (majority) in Guizhou Province. Yu studies how the Miao and Dong group, both dominant minority groups in the Qiandongnan region, distinguished themselves from Chinese Han in the past and how they have been assimilated and integrated by Chinese Han in the recent decades. In the specific context of the Miao group, *Migration Culture of Miao* (Yang, 2006) discusses the recognition of identity during historical and contemporary migrations, in which he emphasizes the function of traditional costume and Miao embroidery in the reconstruction of ethnicity. *Surplus Labor Output of Guizhou Province* (Yi, 2015) studies specifically the migration of surplus labor from Guizhou province to southeast part of China and its effect on acculturation by mainstream. Yi discusses the role of ethnicity, cultural similarity, and discrimination in the acculturation process, offer an operational definition for context of

reception, and calls for studies on the role that the context of reception plays in the acculturation process.

As for the **authenticity** and **tourism**, Greenwood (1977) claims that commoditization changes the meaning of cultural products and of human relations, making them eventually meaningless. MacCannell (1973) proposes “staged authenticity” for the touristic performance, which thwart the tourist’s genuine desire for authentic experiences. From another perspective, Erik Cohen (1988) suggests that the authenticity of tourism is negotiable. He also argued that commoditization does not necessarily destroy the meaning of cultural products, although it may change it or add new meanings to old ones.

1.2. History of Miao Embroidery

1.2.1 Overview of Miao Minority

As epitomized by Tylor's definition: "Culture or Civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society." (1871:1). This definition of culture is often used interchangeably with ethnicity to divide the world into discrete peoples marked by putatively distinction. Accordingly, the Miao would be identified by a set of systematic features as exemplified, for example, by the Human Relations Area Files, which organizes data on language, location, settlement patterns, housing, economy, productive activities, descent, marriage, family, religion, and sociopolitical organization to produce distinctive ethnographic profiles. (Lebar, 1964:64-72).

Miao people called themselves in different ways from region to region. "Hmongb", "Mongb", "Hmaob", "Maobl", "Hmub", "Mub", "Hmangb" or "Mangb" are common pronunciations. (Tang, 1987) The term "Miao" (Chinese: 苗) was created by the Chinese Han in Song Dynasty (960 - 1279). Some studies claim that it was chosen as a derogatory label meaning "sprouts" or "weeds" likely because part of the character includes the radical for grass and the field radical (Oakes, 1998). Another theory suggests that the Han people listened to the Miao language and thought it sounded like cats and created the name to imitate the sound of a cat (Van Rijn, 2016). The name "Miao" gained its official status in 1949 as a term to refer to an ethnic group that includes populations of linguistic-related ethnic minorities in southwest of China, namely in the provinces of Guizhou, Hunan, Yunnan, Sichuan, Guangxi, Hainan, Guangdong and Hubei.

The Miao's legends suggest that they lived along the Yellow River and Yangtze River valleys as early as 5000 years ago. In the 3rd century, the ancestors of the Miao went west to the northwest of Guizhou province and south of Sichuan province along the Wujiang River. In the 9th century, some were forced to migrate to nearby Yunnan province due to battles

and natural disasters. As a result of these large-scale migrations over centuries, the Miao became widely dispersed. Most part of Miao people migrated to the forests and mountains of southwest China, as an old Miao saying goes: "Birds nest in trees, fish swim in rivers, Miao live in mountains." Along the history, some other subgroups of Miao migrated out of China to Southeast Asia, such as northern Vietnam, Laos, Burma and Thailand.

According to the data from the sixth national census of China's population³, the population of Miao ethnicity was 9,426,007 in total, of whom 4,870,328 were men and 4,555,679 were women. The Guizhou province has the largest population of Miao in China, with 3,968,400 people, representing 42.1% of the national Miao's population.

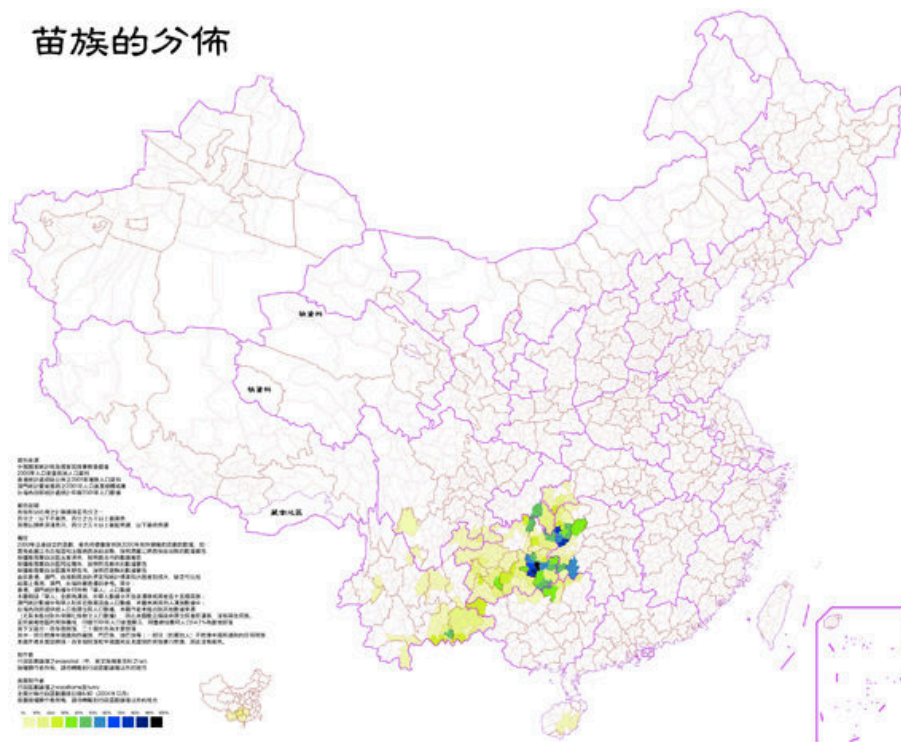


Figure 1 Map of Miao people's Distribution⁴

³ <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/pcsj/rkpc/6rp/indexch.htm>

⁴ Figure Source : <http://miaozu.h.baik.com/article-53361.html>

In general, the regions where most Miao people live are hilly or mountainous, irrigated by several big rivers. Belonging to humid subtropical climate, the average annual temperature is around 15°C, raining profusely in summer time. Since timber resources are plentiful in most Miao areas, houses are usually built of wood, and roofed with fir bark



or tiles or are thatched with straw. In mountainous areas, houses are built on slopes and raised on stilts. Animals are kept under the stilted floors. *Diaojiolou* in figure 2 is a typical Miao house style.

A considerable portion of Guizhou's landscape consists of carbonate rocks, which are easily eroded by rains. The eroded land and thin, acidic soil make the mechanization of agriculture difficult. The main productions include paddy rice, maize, potatoes, Chinese sorghum, beans, rape, peanuts, tobacco, ramie, sugar cane, cotton and oil-tea camellia. The Miao generally prefer sour and spicy dishes because of the humidity. The underground of Miao regions is also abundant in mineral resources. For example, in the central and the western regions of the Guizhou province, the coal, aluminum, iron and copper resources are considerable.

The Miao language belongs to the Sino-Tibetan system. Over the centuries, due to the forced migration and political divisions, the Miao spread to different regions leading to the formation of different dialects. According to the research on Chinese linguists, the Miao language can be divided into 3 main dialects and 7 sub-dialects. The writing form of Miao language is more complicated. There were more than a dozen ways of writing, but none of them has been universally accepted as an official standard before twentieth century. Around 1905, inspired by Canadian indigenous syllables, Samuel Pollard presented the standard Pollard system to the Miao language. In the 1950s, Latin-based alphabets Pinyin were

outlined by the Chinese government to replace the Pollard script.

As for Miao's religion, Miao people are generally animists, shamanists and ancestor worshipers. They believe that entities in nature – such as animals, plants, and often even inanimate objects – possess a spiritual essence. Shamans are called to cure illness by presiding rites to bring lost souls back, using offerings such as liquor, meat, and glutinous rice. They also play an important role in funerals, making sure that the dead will not become a malevolent spirit. During the integration process with Chinese Han over the centuries, their beliefs have been shaped somewhat by Chinese religions, namely Taoism and Buddhism, and, more recently in the case of some groups, Christianity and Catholicism. (Long, 2006).

Regarding traditional festivals, there are celebrations for the Miao New Year⁵, Lusheng Festival⁶, Sisters' Meal Festival⁷, New Rice Tasting Festival⁸, Pure Brightness⁹ and so on. Most of these festivals include religious activities and entertainment activities, such as singing, dancing, horse racing, horse fighting, bullfights, cockfights and swinging.

With respect to the marriage, the Miao practice monogamy. Marriages are usually arranged by parents while unmarried men and women have the freedom to court. Miao's households are generally extended families, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins living nearby or in the same households.

⁵ The Miao people celebrate their own New Year's Day. It falls during the tenth month of the lunar calendar (late October or November). This is the most important festival for the Miao ethnic group.

⁶ The Lusheng is a traditional musical instrument made of bamboo. Many Miao people are excellent Lusheng players. The Lusheng Festival is celebrated from the 16th to the 20th day of the first lunar month (February or early March).

⁷ It is similar to western Valentine's Day, celebrated from the 16th to the 18th of the third month of the lunar calendar (usually in April).

⁸ It is a grand occasion for the Miao to taste newly ripe rice and celebrate the coming harvest (in september).

⁹ It is a traditional ancestor's day in 4 or 5 April. Miao people will visit the columbaria, graves or burial grounds to pray to their ancestors.

I.2.2 History of Miao Embroidery

Embroidery is a way to create drawings and ornamental figures on fabric by hand or machine, using needles and various types of materials, such as cotton yarn, silk, wool, linen, metal etc. Famous Chinese embroideries include Su Embroidery (Jiangsu Province), Xiang Embroidery (Hunan Province), Shu Embroidery (Sichuan Province) and Jing Embroidery (Beijing city). Unlike the above embroidery, classified by regions and cities, Miao embroidery refers exclusively to the embroidery of ethnic group Miao. The clothes, trousers, skirts, shoes, hats, socks, scarves, handkerchiefs and belts of their festive dress, and even daily common dress and articles for daily use are embroidered with figures and designs. The traditional patterns, skillful techniques, varied colors and cultural connotations of the Miao's embroideries are unique and are of great importance in Chinese embroidery culture.

In the historical records, the origin of Miao embroidery can be traced back to 4800 years ago. *Chronicles of Huayang*¹⁰ recorded that before Xia Dynasty (2070 BC–1559 BC), the aristocratic class of Miao had already started to contribute to the treasures to their king on important rituals through gifts which included embroidered fabrics. During excavations of ruins in Jing Shan of Hubei province (2875 BC–2635 BC), embroidered fabrics were discovered, confirming the historical records.

In the Qin Dynasty (221 BC–207 BC), the central government introduced a new tax system, applicable to the barbarous regions, including the Miao. In the annual tribute to the central government colored fabrics were recorded. (Yang, 1998:186) In the Dong Han Dynasty (25–220 AD), *Fengsu Tongyi*¹¹ reported that Miao people had begun to use colored costumes during festivals and parties.

¹⁰ *Chronicles of Huayang* or *Huayang Guo Zhi* is the oldest extant gazetteer of a region of China, compiled by Chang Qu during the Jin Dynasty (266-420 AD).

¹¹ *Fengsu Tongyi*, literally *Comprehensive Meaning of Customs and Habits*, is a book written by Ying Shao in 195 AD.

Between the Tang Dynasty and the Ming Dynasty (618–1616 AD), costume with Miao embroidery was no longer a unique symbol of upper class and began to enter into the daily life of Miao people. During this period, for political reasons, Miao people migrated central to southwest of China, mainly to the provinces of Guizhou, Hunan, Yunnan and Guangxi. The geographical part of *Book of Sui*¹² recorded that the colorful costumes with special embroideries became popular in the southwestern Miao regions.

In the Qing Dynasty (1616–1912 AD), central government officials started to replace the local government officials, known as the "Bureaucratization of Native Officials". It was aimed at strengthening the contact between the Han Chinese (dominant ethnic group of China) and other minority groups, including the Miao. This politics promoted greatly the development of Miao's economy and culture. During this period, Han people entered into the Miao region and brought advanced methods of sericulture and textile production, consequently promoted a rapid development of Miao embroidery. As registered in the *Book of Qian*¹³: women of Miao begun to know how to raise silkworms and started to embroider in silk. The extent to which Miao had submitted to bureaucratic control was indexed by a widely circulated pejorative taxonomy of "raw" and "cooked". "Cooked" Miao referred to those who lived closer to Han settlements in sedentary communities where they were under some kind of governance, paid taxes, and manifested a modicum of Chinese cultural influence while the "raw" Miao referred to those living in areas beyond government control and not paying taxes or labor service to the state. Both of them produced Miao embroidery, but "cooked" Miao used more Han materials and skills than "raw" Miao did. (Louisa Schein, 2000:8).

Throughout the Republican period (1911–1949), the government favored a policy of

¹² *Book of Sui* is the official history of the Sui dynasty, written by a team of prominent scholars, including Yan Shigu, Kong Yingda, and Zhangsun Wuji, completed in 636 AD.

¹³ *Book of Qian* is the official history of Guizhou Province, written by Yongshun, completed in 1760 AD.

assimilation for the Miao and discouraged expressions of ethnicity. During this period, Miao embroidery suffered declination. (You, 1997:49) After the foundation of the People's Republic of China (1949), Miao participated in land reform, collectivization, and various national political campaigns. In the autonomous areas created in the beginning of 1952, the Miao were encouraged to revive and elaborate their costumes, music, and dance. During the Cultural Revolution years (1956–1966), Miao embroidery suffered considerably for that the expressions of ethnicity were strongly discouraged once again. Then, since the Chinese Economic Reform¹⁴ in 1978, Miao embroidery began to enter into the new era with the development of globalization.

¹⁴ The Chinese Economic Reform refers to the program of economic reforms termed "Socialism with Chinese characteristics" in the People's Republic of China that was started in December 1978 by reformists within the Communist Party of China, led by Deng Xiaoping.

1.3. Characteristics of Miao Embroidery

1.3.1 Materials

For a long time, the principle cloth material of Miao's traditional costume is linen because Miao people mainly lived in mountainous area where cultivation of flax is more practical than cotton. Although the Miao people learnt with the Han to work with silk, this material is always difficult to produce and relatively expensive. Besides, as Miao people need to climb up and down in the mountains during their daily life, linen-based costume is easier to wash compared to the delicate silk-based one. (Yang, 1998)

Given to the development of commercialization, the cotton cloth is more accessible and much cheaper than ever before. Easy and comfortable to wear, the cotton is becoming a popular material for making traditional costumes. The choice of cloth is relevant with the availability and price, depending also on the status of the people or household.

In relationship to the yarns, the materials vary from cotton, silk, wool, linen, copper, tin and gold. The cotton and silk yarns are the most common materials, used for all kinds of embroidery; the linen yarn is mainly used for embroidery with rough style; the copper, tin or even gold line are used in delicate parts of the pattern.



Figure 3: Villagers sorting out yarns in Ka

Wu: Yu Hongjia



Figure 4: Villager doing Miao

embroidery in Ka Wu: Yu Hongjia

The needles are usually made of iron and categorized by length and thickness. The choice of needle depends on the thickness of cloth and yarns. During the process, embroiders also need scissors to cut the yarns and thimble to protect their fingers.

I.3.2 Color

Before the introduction of chemical techniques and industrialization, Miao women used to dye yarns and fabrics themselves. The sources of the colors were taken from natural plants, especially from the roots, stems, leaves and seeds. Taking the red dye for example, it was collected from different kinds of red flowers. Yellow was collected from rhubarb roots. The dyeing process of yarn and fabrics is done in the following steps: Firstly, wash the plants and crush them with hands or some instruments and mix the pulp with water. Next, put the yarn or fabrics in this water and boil it for some hours. Then take out the yarn or fabrics and dry them under the sun. This process will have to be repeated several times until the color finally stays in the material.

Nowadays, most of the yarn and fabrics today used are purchased from the market, which are industrially stained with chemistry. The choice of color is richer than ever before.

The base color of costume is one of the easiest ways to distinguish different subgroups of Miao. There're five main Miao subgroups in China, namely Miao Red, Miao Blue, Miao Colored, Miao White and Miao Black. The main color of the costume is simply implied by their names. The use of supplementary color has to match the main color to reach a harmonious effect.

Red Miao costume is based on red cloth, accompanied with yarns of pink, orange, blue, yellow, etc. Miao Blue is based on blue fabric and accompanied with threads of gray, yellow, white and dark red. Miao Colored does not have a specific rule as to the base color. Colorful threads draw more attention to patterns. Miao White is based on white fabric, decorated with red, black and dark blue threads. Miao Black is based on black-blue fabric, combining with other colored threads.

The difference between the main colors had important functions in ancient society. For example, the village Ka Wu belongs to the Qiandongnan Region, a region dominated by Miao Black. Here, people live mainly in forests and woodlands. Their ancestor used the color

black as the base color to coordinate with the natural color. In this way, it is easier to approach their prey or to avoid the ferocious beasts.

In the above circumstances, the costume color also differs according to age. The costume of young people is usually more colorful, using mainly yellow, red, white and green. While the elder's is simpler, preferring blue, purple and black. The same phenomenon happens with the festive costume and with daily costume. The former one is more colorful and vivid and the latter is simpler and modest.



Figure 5: Embroidery work for Young people's costume in Ka Wu: Yu Hongjia

Miao people do not have taboos in color combination. Women wear daringly red with green, purple with green, and purple with black, which some people would consider as bad color coordination. Among the Black Miao of the Qiandongnan Region, for example, the combination of red and green is used in various patterns. Red and green are used in forming

large blocks, then, other colors such as blue, orange or pink are used to define the line of the pattern, so that the entire pattern is smooth and shiny, with a strong tridimensional feel.

1.3.3 Techniques

The usage of different techniques is one the most important part during the entire process of embroidery. Miao women usually use paper-cut as the base shape, and some are also embroidered spontaneously. The shapes, colors and structures are elaborately designed beforehand. They have to think about what is the most appropriate



Figure 6: Crossing stitch in Ka Wu village: Yu Hongjia

technique for a pattern and how many techniques can be applied simultaneously. In addition to the old techniques like cross stitch and flat stitch, Miao people created their own stitches and techniques over the years. Nowadays, there're more than 18 Miao embroidery techniques still in existence, and 9 of them are commonly used in Ka Wu village:



Figure 7: Flat stitch in Ka Wu: Yu Hongjia

(1) Flat stitch (see figure 7): mainly used in the sleeves waist, corsets and shoulders, is the most commonly used method. Embroidered with two needles together, it is simple, ingenious and flat. It is suitable for embroidering small figures.

(2) Rim locking stitch (see figure 8): mainly used in skirts, shoes, and sleeves. Rim locking is one of Chinese ancient embroidery stitch techniques. Insert needle in the cloth, round thread on the needle and take out the needle. As the name suggested, the stitch is like a chain effect.



Figure 8: Rim lock stitch in Ka Wu: Yu Hongjia



Figure 9: Coiling stitch in Ka Wu: Yu Hongjia

(3) Coiling stitch (see figure 9): wrapping the yarn around the needle, this technique is applied especially for dragon and phoenix patterns, which has an effect of relief.

(4) Horsetail stitch: mainly used on sleeves, skirts and shoulders. It combines horsetail hair and cotton yarn to do the embroidery.

(5) Winding stitch: mainly used in front of costume and on shoulder. The shape of winding stitch is like twisted wind or wave. Piling stitch: mainly used in skirts.

(6) Double needle stitch (see figure 10), mainly used on shoes and sleeves. As the



Figure 10: Double needle stitch: Yu Hongjia

name suggested, double needle stitch repeats every stitch twice. Therefore, the pattern is usually very thick, ideal for shoes and sleeves that wear down easily. This kind of embroidery is rough and tasteful, and is often used on big designs.

(7) Piling stitch (see figure 11) uses a lot of triangles in different sizes. One piled upon another one to form a tridimensional effect.



Figure 11: Piling stitch in Ka Wu: Yu Hongjia

(8) Cross stitch (see figure 6): mainly used on shoulder and sleeves. It is the basic stitch technique in Miao embroidery, using smaller geometrical

patterns to form a bigger one. The structure should be balanced and symmetric according to the latitude and longitude lines of the cloth.



Figure 12: Patchwork stitch in Ka Wu village: Yu Hongjia

(9) Patchwork stitch (see figure 12), mainly used on skirts and shoulders. Unlike other stitch techniques that use yarns, patchwork stitch sticks directly other colorful fabrics to the base fabric.

According to *Miao Embroidery Techniques* (1999), there are also (10) Fishnet stitch, (11) Straight needle stitch, (12) Wring stitch, (13) Wrinkling stitch, (14) Braid stitch, (15) Inlay stitch, (16) Split line stitch, (17) Flat silk stitch and (18) Tin stitch, etc.

I.3.4 Cultural Connotation of Embroidery Patterns

Being a primary art, Miao embroidery is a combination art between daily life and artistic aesthetics. These culturally and geographically local patterns are born from the mythology and surrounding environment. The main objectives of patterns are to show respect towards nature and the gods, to meet the needs of daily life and to pursue peace, happiness and prosperity. The contents of Miao embroidery patterns are generally classified into three themes: a) history and legend, b) totem worship, c) real life description.

I.3.4.1 History and Legend

History and legend are among the main themes of the Miao embroidery. Ancestors, wars between Miao and other tribes, and migratory routes are common historical contents in Miao embroidery.

It is said that Chi You was the strongest ancestor in Miao's history. His figure can be found in many pieces of Miao embroidery. Typically, the figure of Chi You is in the center of the pattern, holding weapons in both hands – knife means justice and stick represents religion. There are two horns on his head, corresponding to worship to the bull totem, which represents power. Usually, the figure is surrounded by symmetrical patterns, such as dragons, butterflies, and fish among others. Such composition of the artistic image can represent the admiration and respect of Miao people to their ancestors.

Another example of historic records is the migration routes, an important feature in Miao group's memory. In the long history, Miao people were forced to leave their homeland in central China to the southwest. The migration routes are usually recorded with geometric patterns, corresponding to different cultural connotations. In Miao's history records "*Qian Shu*"¹⁵, Lan Juan was a Miao group leader in ancient Miao society (around 4000 BC). It is said that she embroidered the whole migration route on her costume. When Miao people

¹⁵ *Qian Shu*, history and local records of Miao minority, written by Tian Wen in Qing Dynasty.

passed through the Yellow River, she used the pattern “S” with the color yellow; when passed through the Yangtze River, she used the pattern “Z” with the color blue; when passed by Lake Dong Ting, she used the pattern ellipse with the color green. She embroidered all the mountains and rivers with symbols and specific colors. In the end, this Miao group arrived in Wu Ling region and in her costume was already embroidered the whole route. These vivid symbols of migration routes have been kept until today. For example, "S" means river, "◇" mean field, "凸" means houses and villages, "I" means trees, etc. (Long, 2006)

1.3.4.2 Totem Worship

Totemism is a belief associated with animistic religions. A totem can be an animal, plant, or other object, natural or supernatural, which provides deeply symbolic meaning for a person or social group.¹⁶ In primitive

society, Miao people believed in animism.

As recorded in ancient Miao song "*Lao Gu Hua*" and the folk legend "*Kai Tian Pi Di*", Miao considered that plants and animals had the same feelings as human beings. Thus, animism and totem



worship provided inexhaustible *Figure 13: Dragon totem collection in Xijiang Miao Museum*

inspirations for the creation of embroidery patterns, which are thought of as “conjunctional, based on the Miao people’s philosophy that the [lives] of people animal[s], plants, and insects in the world are equal [and] interchangeable” (Chen, 2015:7). Dragon, butterfly, bull and fish are the most representative totems in Miao embroidery.

The dragon totem is one of the most powerful totems in Chinese culture, which represents the leader of a country or of an ethnic group. Dragon is the personification of the

¹⁶ Wagner, Roy. "Totemism." *Encyclopedia of Religion*, New York: MacMillan Publishing, 1987. 573-576.

primordial power – the supreme ruler of the five basic elements.¹⁷ Thus, it serves as a powerful guardian of the Miao. Patterns with different shapes dragon are often found in Miao embroidery, combined with decorative flower and tree branches. In some cases, dragon appears together with monsters, ghosts, beasts, deities and human figures, representing the Miao’s mysterious and legendary traditions and culture.

The butterfly (see figure 14) is a special symbol in Miao society. "Butterfly Song", an ancient Miao legend, registered that Jiang Yang, the first ancestor of the Miao was the son of butterfly and whirlpool. Therefore, the Miao embroidery has different forms of butterfly, in order to show people’s respect to their first ancestor.



Figure 14: Butterfly pattern in Ka Wu village: Yu Hongjia



Figure 15: Bull totem collection in Xijiang Miao Museum

The bull, representing power and strength, is also a typical symbol in Miao’s culture. As a great helper in cultivation, bull is considered to be one of the most respected animals by Miao people. In traditional festival “Gong Niu”, Miao people will hold bullfight games in order to show their powerfulness and strength.

The fish totem worship is a common phenomenon in many ethnic groups because the fish is a symbol of reproductive capacity in Chinese culture. In the history, Miao people suffered a lot from wars and migrations, resulting in a sharp decline of population. Therefore,

¹⁷ Five elements: metal, wood, water, fire and earth.

fish patterns are often found on the costumes with the wish to have more descendants. Sometimes, fish and bird patterns are portrayed together since the bird also signifies a strong natural desire for reproduction. For instance, fish painted with feathers and beaks, or birds carrying fish in their beaks represents copulation between a male and female (Chen, 2015:2). Nowadays, some regions in Guizhou



Province still preserve the traditional “Fish Festival”, on which Miao couples will eat fish in order to have more children.

Figure 16: Fish Pattern in Ka Wu village: Yu Hongjia

1.3.4.3 Real life



Figure 17: Flower Pattern in Ka Wu village: Yu Hongjia

The scenes of daily life are also registered in Miao embroidery. For example, the cultivation of agriculture crops such as rice and corn, flowers and fruit trees in bloom, fishing in ponds, cattle and domestic birds etc. There are also family scenes, such as children playing with each other, man on the way home, woman working at home, etc. These peaceful and happy scenes represent Miao people’s good wishes for life.

1.3.5 Festive Costume and Daily Costume

The female costume used in festivals has big differences from the daily ones. It is generally more colorful and has more complicated patterns. In this chapter, we analyze the daily costume, the festive costume and wedding costume of Ka Wu village in Qiandongnan Region, which is dominated by Miao Black.

1.3.5.1 Daily costume

The main function of daily costume is to be practical and convenient for daily life. Therefore, the top and bottom usually have only one layer. The top is in color blue, the sleeves are usually embroidered simply with flowers, birds and butterflies while the bottom can be a pleated skirt or trousers in black or dark blue color.



Figure 18: Daily Costume in Ka Wu Village: Yu Hongjia

The daily costume differs according to age and status. A young girl's daily costume is usually more colorful than the married woman's, and the elder's is the most simpler style with dull color. Thus, the daily costume has the function to distinguish age and marriage stages.

1.3.5.2 Festive Costume



Figure 19: Festival Costume in Ka Wu village: Yu Hongjia

Compared with daily costume, the festive costume is more complicated and more colorful. The tops usually have two layers: the inner layer is dyed with black or dark blue, and the exterior is in blue or purple. The sleeves and the back are embroidered with patterns of dragon, tiger, sheep, fish, butterflies, insects or other animals, in the color red, blue, green, yellow among other bright colors.

The most popular pattern in Miao people's festive costume is a dragon with a pair of large ox horns, along with "grandma dragon" and "grandpa dragon" who have ox horns and human faces.

The skirt, like the tops, also has two layers. The inner layer is pleated skirt in black. The pleated skirt is an important feature of Miao costume. It represents symbolically those challenges that Miao ancestors encountered during migration from the central plains to the mountainous region. The outer layer is embroidered with flowers, birds, insects, phoenix, dragon, etc. These patterns focus on the living environment and good hope of life.

1.3.5.3 Wedding Costume



Figure 20: Wedding Costume in Ka Wu village: Yu Hongjia

The Miao's wedding costume is a special kind of festive costume, which represents the most sophisticated skill of Miao embroidery. It is developed from Xiong Yi, which means male's wedding costume in ancient society. As women could not cultivate the land or fight with enemies as men did, the order of marriage between men and women changed, so did the user of Xiong Yi.

The characteristics of Xiong Yi is similar to the festive costume, but with more details. It has no collar nor buttons but only cloth belt to tighten the tops. The patterns usually describe fight with enemies, dragons, decorated with birds, flowers, plants and geometric patterns, in order to keep in mind how the ancestors won the battles and coexisted with nature throughout history.

The wedding costume derived from Xiong Yi has developed and innovated over the centuries. The main color is red, just like in many other Chinese ethnic groups. Red in Chinese culture means good luck. Dragon and phoenix are always represented, symbolizing the husband and wife. Fish and butterflies are wishes to have many children. In addition to the wedding costume, the bride needs to wear decorative pieces of silver on the head, neck and wrists. The more pieces of silver she uses, the wealthier is the family.

1.4. Cultural Function of Miao Embroidery

According to Malinowski, individuals have physiological needs (reproduction, food, shelter) and that social substances and institutions exist to meet these needs. (Malinowski, 1922) The ethnic costume – a result of natural conditions, cultural background and ideology – is as an interface between the human body and the natural and cultural environment. The decorations of cloth serve subtler aesthetic and expressive needs.

In the context of cultural function, we use the term "costume" rather than "clothing" for that "clothing" is a more neutral term, whose primary function is the body's protection or ornamentation – "everything that serves to cover the body, adorn it, or to protect it from time injuries". While "costume", a word that came from Italy in the seventeenth century, has an etymology evokes "custom" (Roche, 1989:12). In this section, we mainly discuss the cultural function of Miao traditional costume, the carrier of Miao embroidery.

1.4.1 Identity Recognition

Ethnic identity, as we understand it is a group's consciousness of its ethnic, historical and cultural peculiarity. Julia (2014) defines clothing as one of the most immediate ways of communicating identity. In this sense, Miao traditional costume, like most other ethnical costumes, expresses and shapes the identity, imbuing it with a directly material reality.

In ancient times, Miao people had a lot of fights and battles with other ethnic groups. In order to strengthen the community's unity, Miao members needed ethnic uniforms to mark their identity. Thus, the Miao traditional costume with decorated embroidery had become one of the ethnic identity's icons. As Nash puts it: "The identity dimension of ethnicity (...) rests on the fact that fellow members of the ethnic group are thought to be 'human' and trustworthy in ways that outsiders are not. " (1989:128). Furthermore, Miao traditional costume also intensifies sociality in birth, marriage, death, rituals, festivals and ceremonies.

I.4.2 History and Religion Record

In the early eighteenth century, Bernard de Montfaucon¹⁸ had already defined the costume as a participant element of recording history. As Miao people had no official written language before 1905, the embroidery became an important tool to register their history, religion, and the culture. Lan Juan's costume, in which she embroidered the whole migration route, is a good example of how history recording through costume and embroidery works. In addition, patterns of Miao traditional costumes reflect religious worship including totem worship, ancestor worship, hero worship and so on.

I.4.3 The Status and Social Ranking

As Breward (2000) notes, costume is one of the ways by which forms of social difference are made visible and concrete. The messages conveyed by Miao traditional costume include indications of the person's gender, age, martial status, wealth, and social class. For example, costumes of rich and upper class people usually have more decorations and adornments because they tend to possess or have access to scarce and expensive resources, such as gold, silver, tin, which are not available to all.

I.4.4 Reflection of Miao Productive Forces and Aesthetics

Costume is originally used to satisfy human necessity of protection towards the natural environment. By using and transforming the natural or artificial materials, human beings have been making clothes with their own creativity. In the different development stage of society, the materials, techniques and aesthetics correspond to the productive forces level. Therefore, Miao traditional costume can be one of the measurements of social development. Besides, it can also reflect the Miao's aesthetic values. "Its unique techniques, patterns, color combinations are one of the best reflections of Miao women wisdom and artistic tastes." (Yexian Long, 2006).

¹⁸ Dom Bernard de Montfaucon (13 January 1655 – 21 December 1741) was a French Benedictine monk of the Congregation of Saint Maur, regarded as one of the founders of modern archaeology.

Chapter II – Miao Embroidery in Contemporary Chinese Society

Miao embroidery has been developed constantly and progressively throughout thousands years. However, the situation of Miao embroidery has changed dramatically in the last few decades. Not only the utilization of traditional costume and the practice of embroidery is decreasing, but Miao people's attitudes towards their traditional culture are changing.

In order to find out the current situation of Miao embroidery in Miao society, I did a two-month fieldwork research in the Ka Wu village during September to November in 2015.

II.1. Overview of Fieldwork Location - Ka Wu Village

Ka Wu village is a Miao village located in the east part of Ma Jiang town in Qiongnan Region, Guizhou Province. Crossed by the Qingshui and the Mawei rivers, Ka Wu village is bounded by Dan Zhai village on east, Long Xiang village on west, Fu Jiang village on north and Weng Bao village on south.



Figure 21: Ka Wu village: Yu Hongjia

The total area of Ka Wu village is 9.73 square kilometers.

The official population of Ka Wu village¹⁹ in 2015 was 955 inhabitants, including 766 Miao, which accounted for 80.2% of the total population. During the fieldwork between September to November of 2015, the actual number of villagers living in Ka Wu was 288, among which 105 were men and 183 were women.²⁰ The rest villagers were working outside of the village, mainly in larger cities where there're higher demand of labor. According to the interviews, these villagers came back home once or twice a year, usually around the Chinese

¹⁹ Statistics provided by Ka Wu village committee in September, 2015.

²⁰ Statistics collected during fieldwork research between September to November, 2015

New Year Festivals. They were still considered as residents of Ka Wu in Chinese household registration system.²¹

On the basis of historical records, Miao female traditional costume has always been more distinctive than male one, thus becoming one of the important criteria of distinction of Miao ethnicity (Wu Zelin, 1941). Besides, nowadays, hardly no Miao male is still using traditional costume owing to the fact that they have more contact with public sphere and hence, more pressure to integrate. Therefore, I focus mainly on female traditional costume in my fieldwork study and my informants are generally females. I also spent shorter time, ranging from one afternoon to two days, at a number of villages near Ka Wu, which helped to contact with more participants with a broader range of backgrounds and experiences.

During fieldwork, I used several methods to get qualitative and quantitative data, which included direct observation, participant observation, questionnaires as well as interviews. By analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data, I can have a better understanding of the current situation of Miao embroidery.

The purpose of survey is to get an overview of Miao embroidery in Miao women's daily lives. Questions range from simple background information to specific questions of Miao embroidery. Background questions included topics such as age, educational background and family's annual income, etc. Specific questions on Miao embroidery included the possession and utilization of traditional costume, the mastery level of Miao embroidery, the age and the ways of acquirement of the techniques and the attitudes towards Miao embroidery, etc.

Besides the questionnaires, I also did face-to-face interviews to obtain further information. The majority of young and adult Miao females I encountered spoke a

²¹ A household registration is a record in a government system of household registration required by law in mainland China, and determines where citizens are allowed to live. It officially identifies a person as a resident of an area and includes identifying information such as name, parents, spouse, and date of birth.

considerable amount of mandarin while the elders spoke mostly in Miao language. In this case, I asked local young people Yang Xiaomei who speaks both mandarin and Miao language for help. The interviews are mainly semi-structured. Depending on the answers of participants, I went further to some other specific questions. It allowed me to probe more deeply into participants' responses and to get informed not only what participants say but also how they say it. It is possible to gather information from the informant's reactions to questions as well as their answers.

II.2. Current situation of Miao Costume in Ka Wu and nearby villages

The first survey of Miao's utilization of traditional costume was made on the basis of villagers from Ka Wu and nearby villages. Since there is a primary school and a weekly market in Ka Wu village, people from nearby villages frequently gather together in Ka Wu. The number of participants was larger than the actual number of Ka Wu female villagers. In total, 360 people were involved in this part of study: 183 women from Ka Wu, 96 from Dan Zhai, 48 from Long Xiang and 43 from Weng Bao. As a part of these participants is illiterate, the research was done through both questionnaires and interviews.

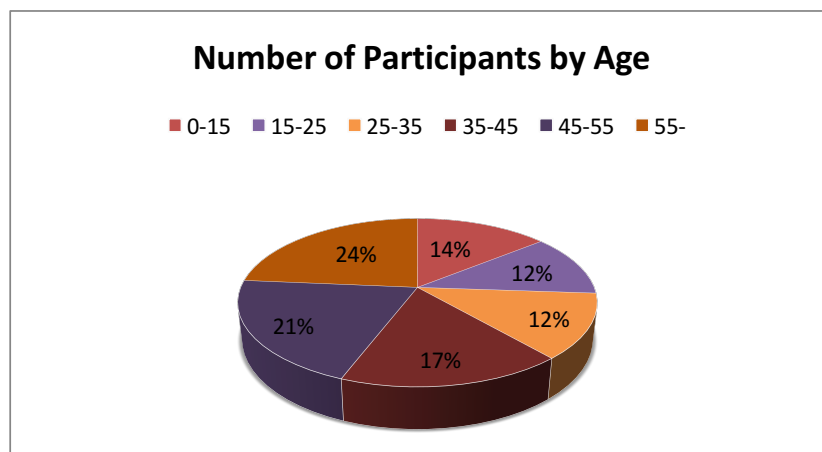


Figure 22: Participants in Ka Wu and nearby villages by age

As illustrated on the table above, the distribution of age is not quite balanced due to adult female villagers who were working outside (mainly between 15-45 years). Whereas there are significant differences between the groups it is not an absurd discrepancy, considering the size of the sample, so the results still reflect general trends of the utilization of Miao traditional costume and Miao embroidery by different age groups.

In this section, the traditional Miao costumes are divided into two types: the festive costume and the daily costume. The questionnaire and interview are consisted of four questions: Do you have your own traditional costumes? If you do, is it hand-made by family members or bought from markets? Do you wear traditional daily costume in your daily life? Do you wear traditional festive costume during festivals?

II.2.1. The Possession of Traditional Costume

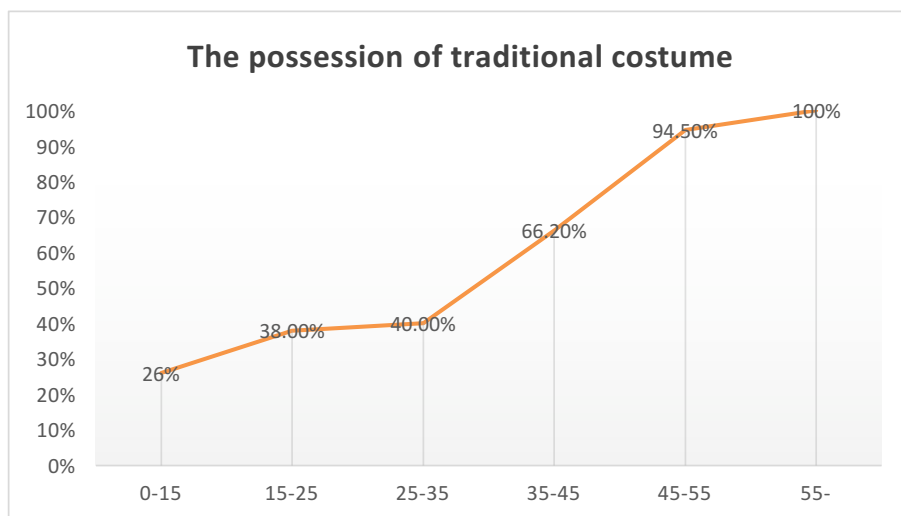


Figure 23 The possession of traditional costume in Ka Wu and nearby villages by age

As shown in the figure 23 above, all of women aged over 55 years own their traditional costumes. The percentage drops a little between 45-55 years and then falls dramatically: only 26% of young people less than 15 years old have traditional costumes.

It is clear that the possession of traditional costumes is proportional to the age. The elder the participant is, the more likely she owns traditional costumes.

II.2.2. The Origin of Traditional Costume

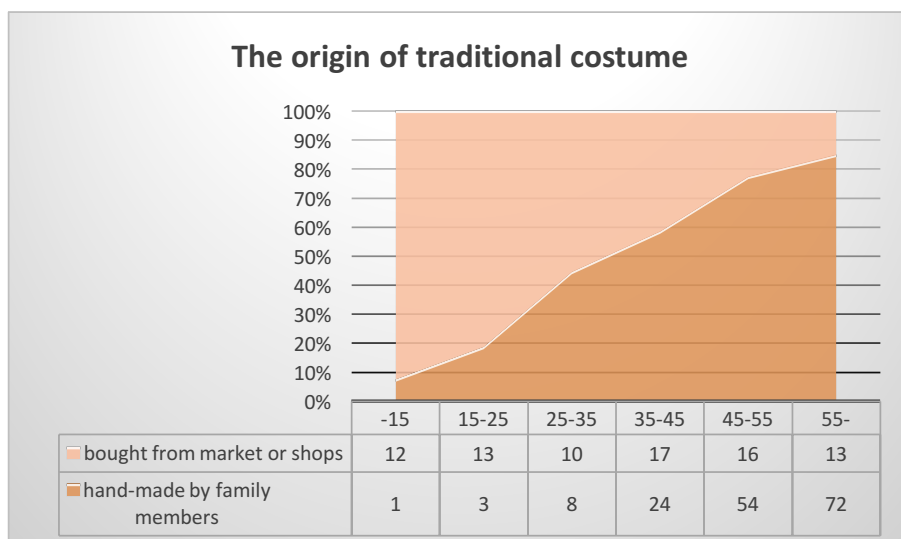


Figure 24: The origin of traditional costume in Ka Wu and nearby villages

their costumes were hand-made by family members such as by themselves, by mother, by grandmother or by other female relatives. The rest 33.3% (81 people) were bought from markets or shops. And in this case, most of the ready-to-wear costumes were machine-made.

As shown in the figure 24, the percentage of hand-made traditional costume is also proportional to age. The elder the participant is, the more likely she owns traditional costume hand-made by family members while the younger participants with less than 35 years old are more inclined to buy the costume from shops and markets.

II.2.3. The Use of Traditional Costume in Daily Life

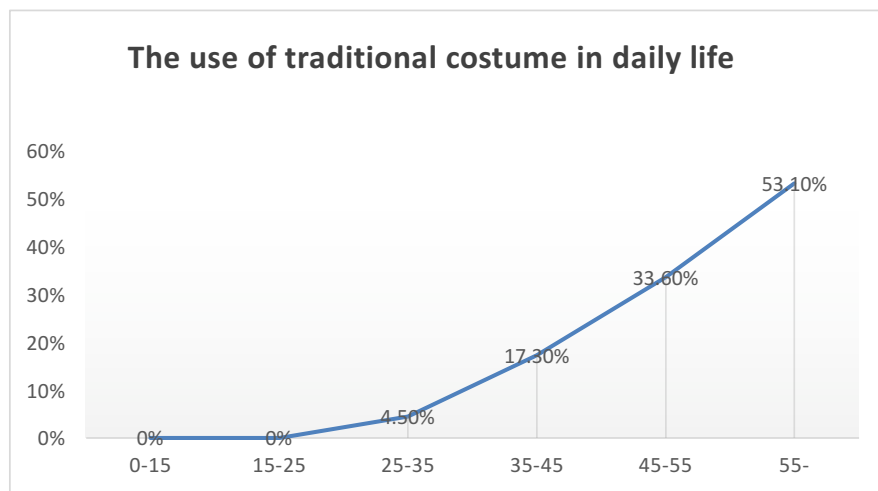


Figure 25: The use of traditional costume in daily life in Ka Wu and nearby villages by age



Figure 26: Young participants in Ka Wu village with their daily costume: Yu Hongjia

the young aged less than 25 years uses traditional costume in their daily life.

In regarding to the use of traditional costume in daily life, figure 25 provides a similar trend with the possession of traditional costume. 53.1% of women aged over 55 years old admit that they use daily traditional costume frequently. Then the number falls sharply to 4.5% between 25-35. And none of

II.2.4 The Use of Traditional Costume in Festivals

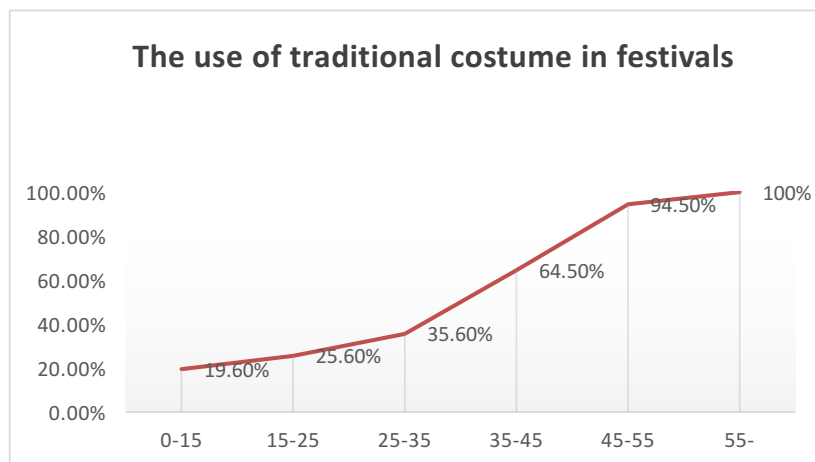


Figure 27: The use of traditional costume in festivals in Ka Wu and nearby villages

Compared to the traditional costume in daily life, the use of festive costume still maintains a certain importance. In the big festivals, 100% of participants over 55 years old wear traditional festival costume. Regarding to the younger female, the percentage is 25.6% between 15-25 years and 19.6% under 15 years old, better than the situation of daily costume.

The result is still proportional to age. The elder they are, the more likely they use festive costume in traditional festivals.



Figure 28: Young participants' festival costume: Yu Hongjia

II.3. Situation of Miao Embroidery Acquirement in Ka Wu Village

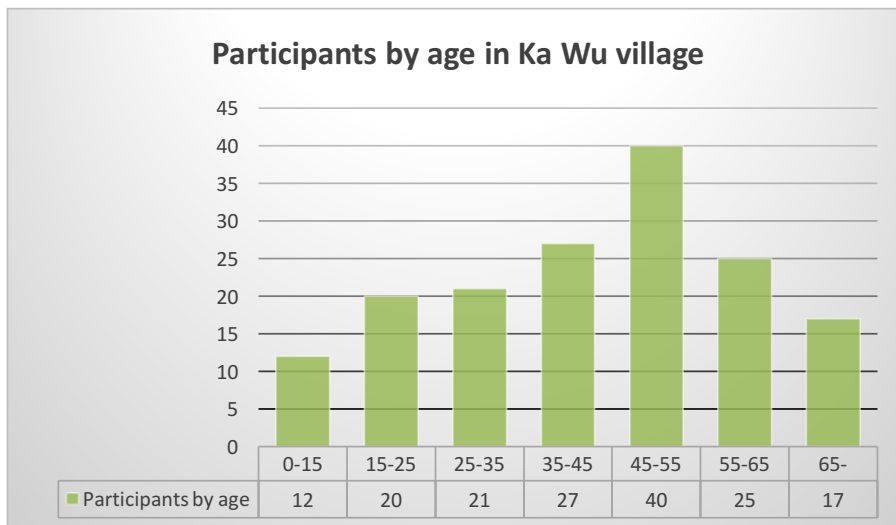


Figure 29: Number of Participants by age in Ka Wu village

The second part of survey is more detailed, aiming at investigating the situation of acquirement of Miao embroidery. The study sample is smaller than the former one. I studied 162 participants mainly in Ka Wu village, involving 74 families. The youngest participant is 9 years old and the oldest is 83 years old.

II.3.1. Background Information

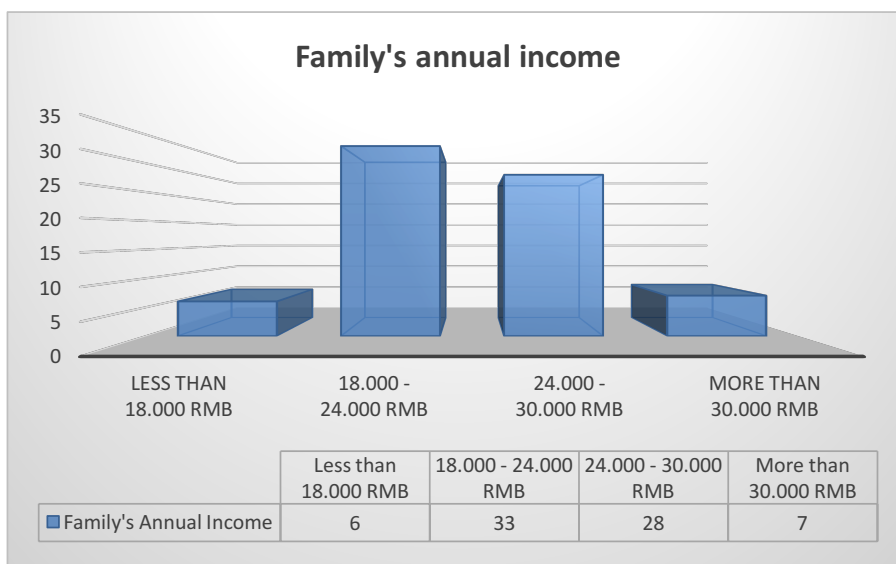


Figure 30: Family's annual income of participants in Ka Wu village

According to the survey, the family's annual income in Ka Wu village mainly ranges

between 18,000 - 30,000 Yuan (2,571 euros - 4,285 euros), occupying 82.4%; 8.3% is less than 18,000 Yuan and 6.9% more than 30,000 Yuan. Generally speaking, the more family members working outside, the more annual income they have.

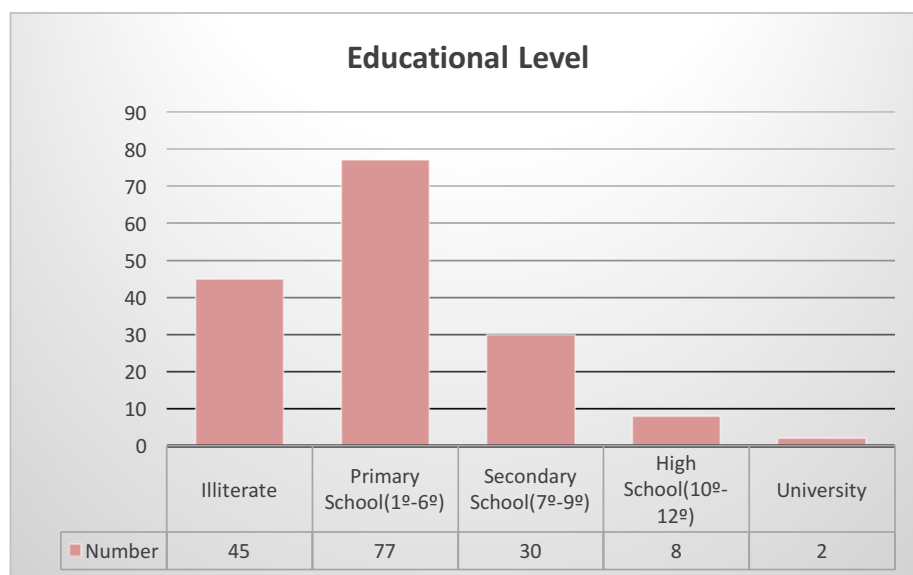


Figure 31: Educational Level of participants in Ka Wu village

As for the education level, 47.5% participants attended primary school; 18.5% attended secondary school and 27.8% are illiterate. Especially women aged over 55, the illiteracy rate is 78.6% because education was not available at that time. This rate drops sharply to 17.3% in women less than 45 years old. The percentage of high education level is low, high school and university take up only 4.3% and 1.2% respectively.

II.3.2. Mastery Level

The knowledge and mastery level of techniques are important assessments in transition of Miao embroidery. Of the more than 18 general techniques existing today, 9 common techniques were found in Ka Wu village. I divided the mastery level of techniques into 4 levels:

Level 1. Insufficient: Know less than 3 techniques and practice rarely

Level 2. Sufficient: Know 3-5 techniques and practice occasionally

Level 3. Good: Know 5-8 techniques and practice often

Level 4. Very Good: Know more than 8 techniques and practice constantly

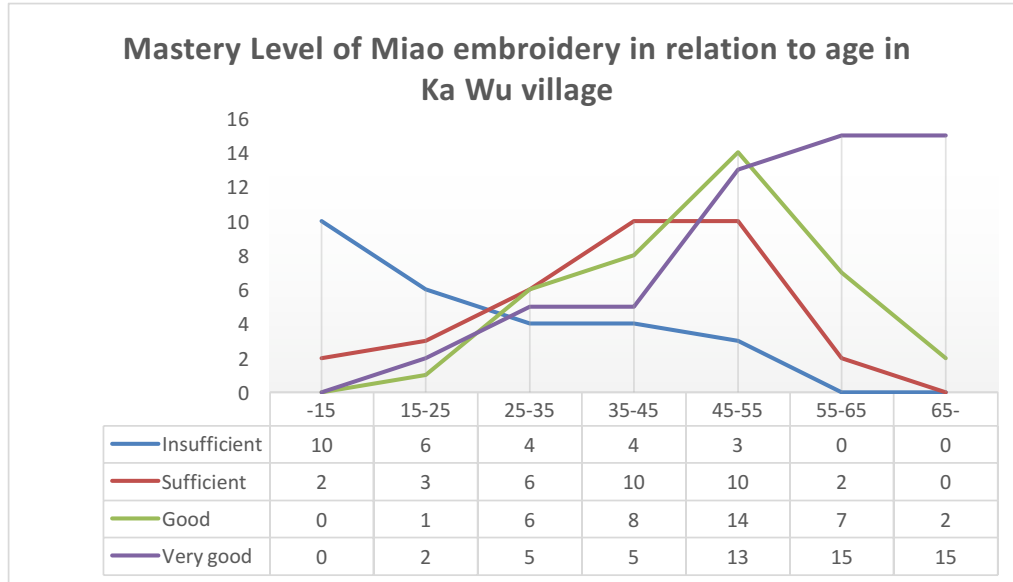


Figure 32: Mastery Level of Miao embroidery in relation to age in Ka Wu village

Through questionnaires and interviews, the relationships between mastery level and age shows in the above chart: It is not surprising to find out that the mastery level is proportional to age. The higher the age, the better the mastery of the techniques.

Women over 65 years old have the highest level of mastery of Miao embroidery, 88.2% (15 people) in very good level. On the contrary, girls less than 15 years old represent the lowest mastery level. Among the insufficient level, 58.3% (7 people) admitted that they have absolutely no mastery of any techniques.

I also crossed the data of mastery level with economic level and educational level, and got the conclusion that the higher the family income and education level is, the lower the mastery level of Miao embroidery.

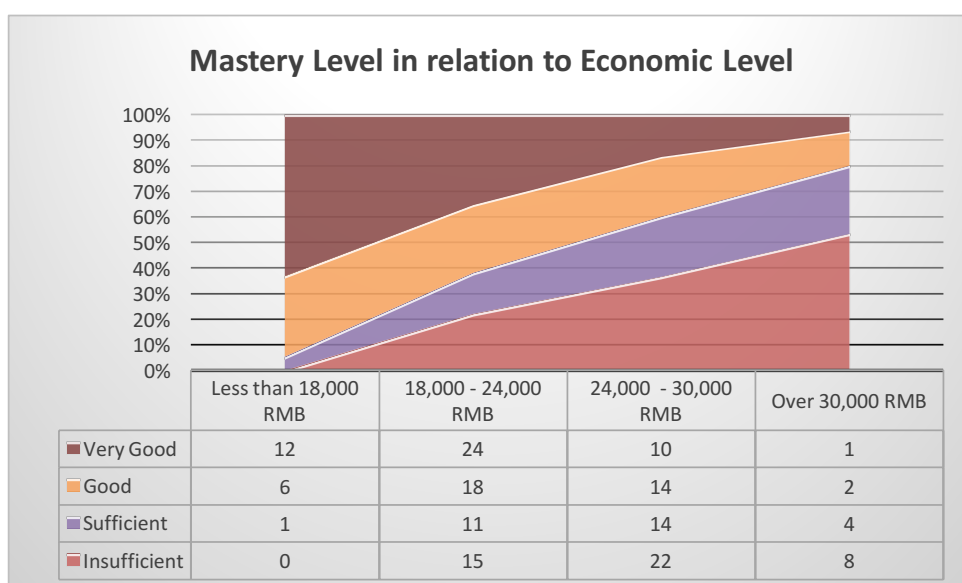


Figure 33: Mastery level of Miao embroidery in relation to economic level in Ka Wu village

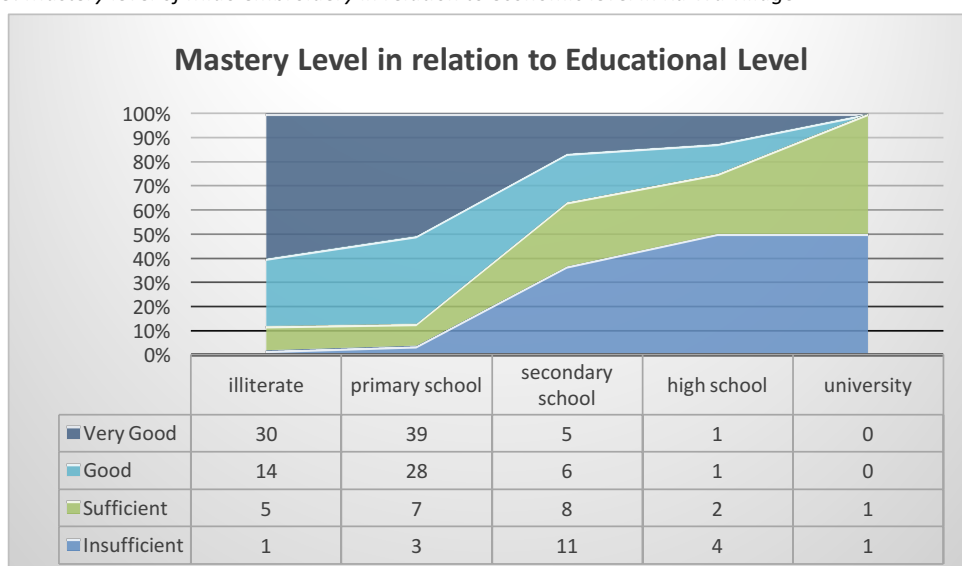


Figure 34: Mastery level of Miao embroidery in relation to educational level in Ka Wu village

The main reason is that work and education has overshadowed the mastery ability of Miao embroidery nowadays.

Li Hai Long (13 years, primary school attending, family annual income between 24,000 – 30,000 Yuan) said: “I don’t know how to do Miao embroidery. Sometimes I am curious about it when my grandmother practices at home. She allows me to try a little bit, but she won’t let me do it for a long time because she thinks that school homework is more

important.”

Lin Xiao (42 years old, secondary school completed, family annual income above 30,000 Yuan): “The more I earn, the less time I have to do the embroidery. Besides, it is affordable for me to buy costumes made by machine from shops or markets. The cost-performance ratio of machine-made costume is much higher than the hand-made one.”

II.3.3. Age and ways of Acquisition

Among the 124 participants with mastery level between level 2 (sufficient) to level 4 (very good), I asked when did they start to learn Miao embroidery.

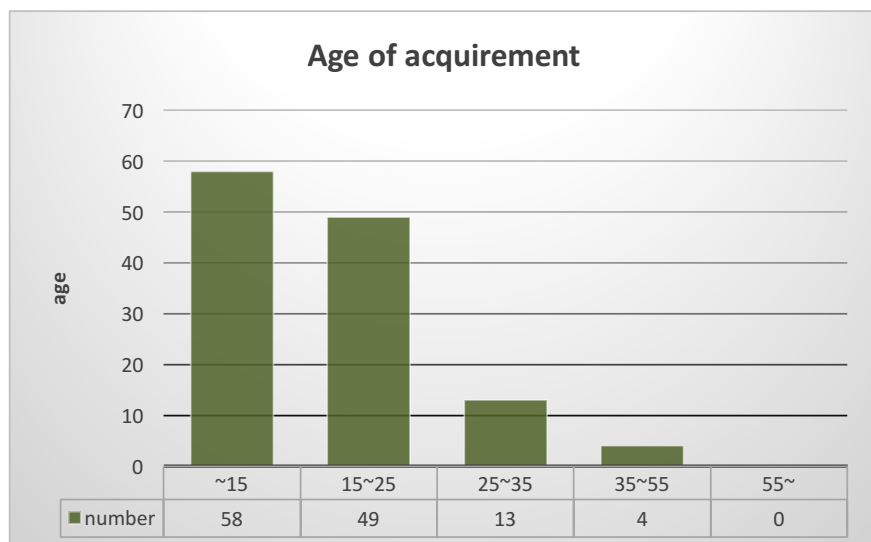


Figure 35: Age of acquirement of Miao embroidery in Ka Wu village

From the results, we can tell that most of Miao women learned embroidery at their young age as 86.3% of them acquired techniques under 25 years old. It is worth remembering that the current young generation in Ka Wu village, only 12.5% of them are above good mastery level while 66.7% are insufficient, which reflects a big change from the past generation.

II.3.4. Ways of Acquisition

Continuing with the above question, I asked how they had acquired the Miao embroidery techniques.

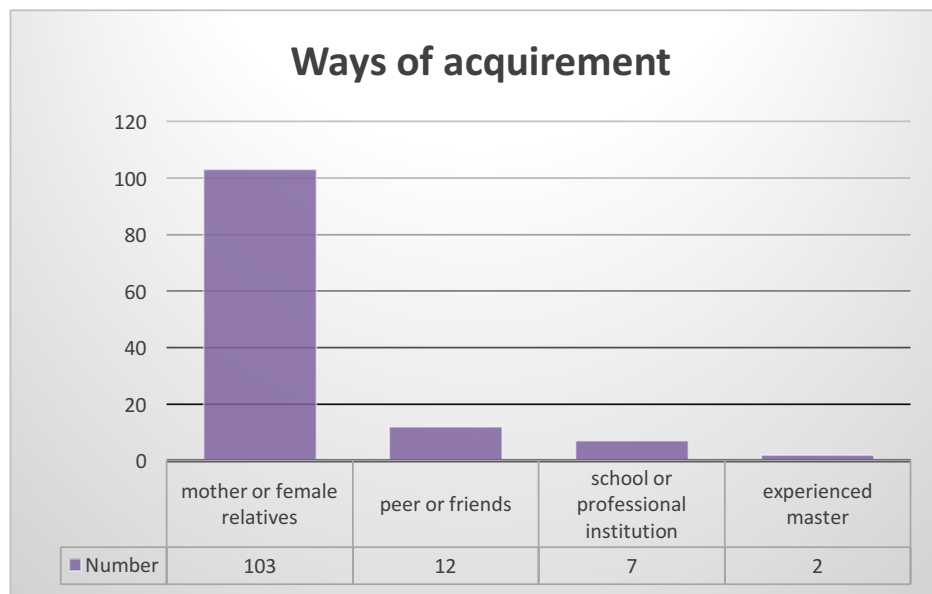


Figure 36: Ways of acquirement of Miao embroidery in Ka Wu village

The result proves that the principal transmission way of Miao embroidery is from the older generation to the younger generation within the family (83%). But it is worth emphasizing that participants (7.3%) who acquired from experienced masters and professional institutions, are between 16-33 years old, which means these are new and growing ways of transmission nowadays.

II.3.5. Innovative Design

Among the 124 participants with mastery level between level 2 to level 4, I asked if they had skipped out traditional patterns and tried some innovative design during practice. One third of them (41 people) said they had tried while the majority (83 people) maintains the old traditions. The creativity is inversely proportional to the age. Among the 41 people with innovative attempts, 53.7% (22 people) were between 9-25 years old.

As for the innovative design contents, they may choose mainstream cultural elements such as cartoon figures, Mandarin characters, modern geometric patterns, modern landscapes, plants and animals besides the traditional canons. When asking for the inspiration of creative attempts, a great part of them said they were inspired by the information on television, Internet, books and other media resources.

II.4. Attitudes Towards Miao Embroidery in Ka Wu Village

In relation to the attitudes of Ka Wu female villagers towards to Miao embroidery, some semi-open questions were made, linking the attitudes with age, economic and educational level to get a glimpse into larger trends of what is happening in cultural preservation.

The participants were divided by age into 3 groups: young group (32 people, below 25), adult group (88 people, 25-55) and elder group (42 people, over 55); by educational level into 4 groups: illiterate group (45 people), lower educational level group (1st-6th grades, 77 people), medium level group (7th-12th grades, 38 people) and higher level group (12th+, 2 people).

II.4.1. Importance Level of Miao Embroidery

The first question is about the importance level of Miao embroidery in Miao ethnicity, the choices ranging from 1-4 (no importance to great importance). 52 people (32%) chose level 4 (great importance); 54 people (33.3%) chose level 3 (big importance); 33 people (20.4%) chose level 2 (a little importance) and 23 people (14.2%) chose level 1 (no importance).

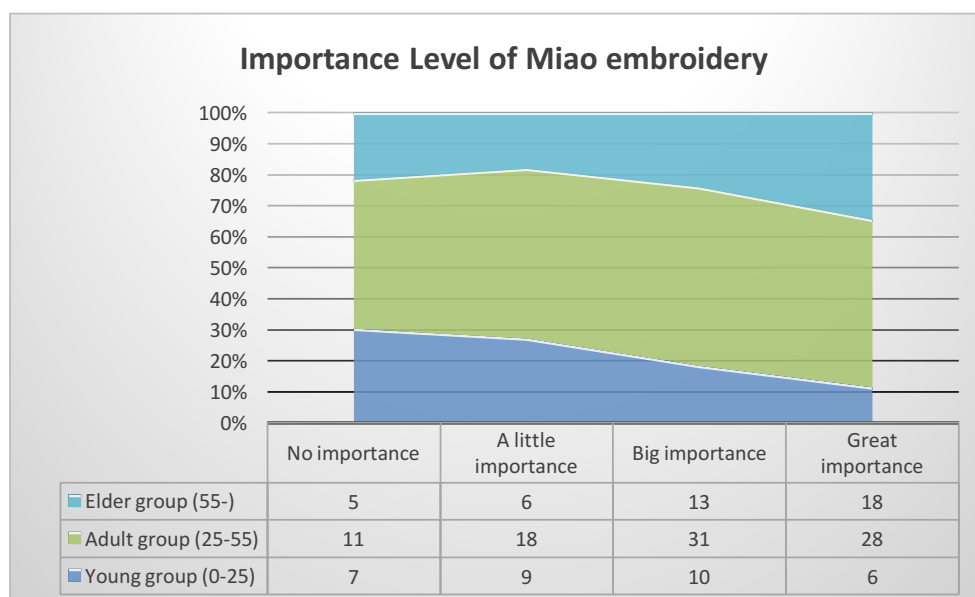


Figure 37: Attitudes of participants towards importance level of Miao embroidery

More than half the participants (55.3%) agreed that the Miao embroidery has big or great importance for Miao ethnicity. The elder group is the biggest supporter, with 73.8% of them chose level 3 and 4. The percentage drops a little bit to 67% at the adult group and continues to go down in young group (50%).

During the interviews, many elder participants recalled that in their youth, the skill of Miao embroidery was one of the most important measures for female's ability and quality. That is, the better the mastery of Miao embroidery, the more probability they had to be respected by family and neighbors. In contrast, if a girl didn't have good skills in Miao embroidery, she would be ridiculed or even could not get a good marriage. As Xiong Liyin (66 years old) claimed: "My husband didn't treat me well initially because I knew only little about embroidery. I felt ashamed and started to learn it industriously with my sister in law. The skill of embroidery Miao was really important in our time."

On the other hand, when I questioned the young people group if they considered the importance of Miao embroidery from this point of view, a majority part of them confirmed that Miao embroidery is no longer a measurement for female ability. As stated before, the level of education level and economic status is more relevant. Nevertheless, half of them still admitted the importance of Miao embroidery. As explained Yang Xiaohua (14 years old): "I am proud when other ethnic groups show their curiosity and admiration for our traditional festive costume. Only we have the traditional costume with this kind of embroidery."

Among the 23 participants who thought Miao embroidery has no importance today, they mainly claim that people wear the traditional costume less and less often (Liu Yang, 15 years old) and the machine-made embroidery will eventually replace handmade embroidery. (Lin Li, 32 years old).

II.4.2. Inheritance Process

The second question is about attitudes towards the transmission or inheritance

process of the embroidery skills: Do you think the Miao embroidery is facing an inheritance crisis? Why?

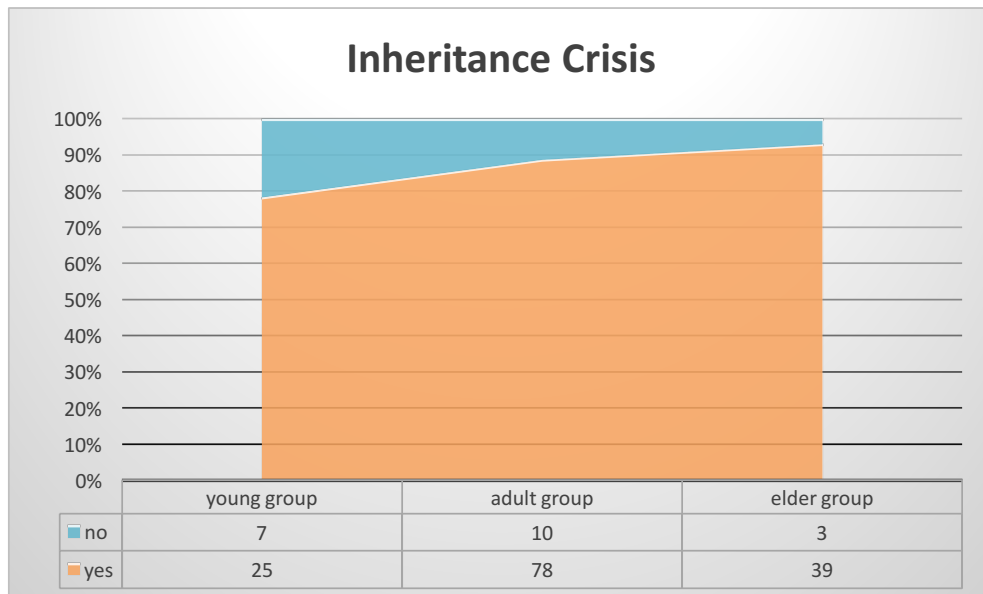


Figure 38: Attitudes of participants towards inheritance crisis of Miao embroider

An overwhelming part of the participants (87.7%) agreed that Miao embroidery is facing an inheritance crisis. The reasons varied from young to old. More than two thirds of the young people admitted that, under the stress of studying or working, they had no time to learn Miao embroidery nor did they have interest in it. They regarded Miao embroidery as an old-fashioned ethnic art and preferred to follow mainstream modern taste. Furthermore, many of their mothers were working outside of village and only went back home once or twice a year, therefore there is nobody at hand to teach them Miao embroidery. The previous data of the utilization of traditional costume also proves that none of the young group between 0-25 years old is wearing traditional costume in their daily lives.

Among the elders' group, their main reason echoes the young people, because there is hardly any successor to inherit the embroidery techniques. As for the adults' group, their main concern is that the economic returns of Miao embroidery are not comparable with other types of works. Instead of staying at home doing embroidery work, most of the female adults are doing agricultural or industrial work. Thus, they hold a pessimistic view about the

inheritance and transmission of the embroidery skills.

For the 20 people (12.3%) who look positively to the inheritance process, their main reason is that new ways of transmission are emerging, such as professional institution of embroidery and private teachers. Instead of the traditional mother to daughter teaching process, there are more and more people who go to industrial working lines, attend specialized training classes or become apprentice of a skilled embroider. “The old way is disappearing, but new way is coming.” Claimed Li Chunxue (25 years old).

II.4.3. Development Tendency of Miao Embroidery

The third question is about their opinion of the development tendency of Miao embroidery in current society. Four options were available: negative, neutral, positive and no comments. The result shows that 50.6% (82 people) holds a negative view, 25.3% (41 people) maintains neutral, 7.4% (12 people) holds a positive view and 16.7% (27 people) had no comments.

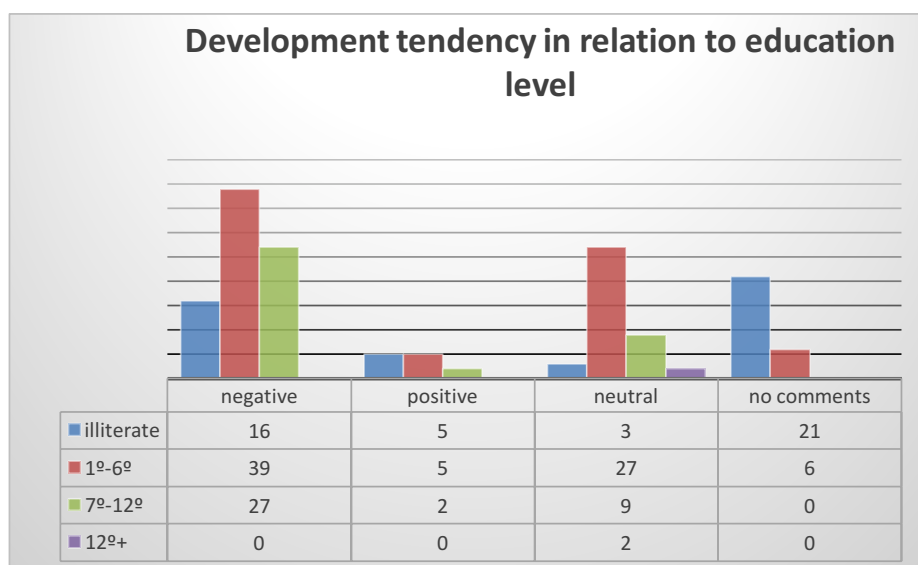


Figure 39: Attitudes towards development tendency of Miao embroidery in relation to education level

Based on this question, the study of relationships with educational level could be addressed. People that had no comments to make are mostly illiterate (21 people) or has lower education level (6 people). Among the negative views, the percentage of people with

medium education (7th-12th) holds more negative views than people with lower education background (1st-6th), with 71.1% versus 50.6%. The reason for higher educated people to believe that the development is negative may be education itself. As mentioned before, the mastery level of techniques is inversely proportional to education level, which means the higher educated people do not have a good mastery of Miao embroidery. It may explain their negative attitudes towards the development of Miao embroidery.

Interestingly, the only two participants with university degree chose a positive view towards the development tendency. I recorded them as follows:

Li Haiyan (25 years old, university graduate):

“I know that local government has started to emphasize the importance of preservation of traditional Miao embroidery. For example, my grandmother and some other elder neighborhoods in village were rewarded with 1500 Yuan (200 euros) for their skillful techniques and good preservation of traditional costumes last year, which encouraged more local people to pay attention to it.”

Bi Xiaohua (22 years old, university graduate):

“The development of tourism in Guizhou Province is in some way encouraging the revival of our traditional handicrafts since tourists are interested in buying handmade Miao embroidery, which is much more delicate than the machine-made ones. Our village is not touristic, but you can see the example of Xijiang Miao village²². They earned a lot of money by selling Miao embroidery and related souvenirs.”

These two representative opinions addressed that the awareness of protection from government and tourism may be important for Miao embroidery's future development.

²² Located on the north side of Leigong Hill in Qiandongnan Region, Xijiang Miao village is one of the largest gathering place of the Miao in China, with 99.5% of the local people are Miao ethnicity.

II.5. Summary of Questionnaire and Interviews

The older the participants are:

- the more likely they possess hand-made traditional costumes.
- the more likely they use traditional daily costumes in daily life.
- the more likely they use traditional festive costumes in festivals.
- the higher mastery level of Miao embroidery they may have.
- the more likely to acquire Miao embroidery from mother or female relatives.
- the less attempts in innovative design.
- the more importance Miao embroidery is for them

The higher educational level the participants have:

- the more likely they possess machine-made traditional costumes.
- the less likely they use traditional daily costumes in daily life.
- the less likely they use traditional festive costumes in festivals.
- the less mastery level of Miao embroidery they may have.
- the more attempts in innovative design.
- the less importance Miao embroidery is for them.
- the more pessimistic towards the inheritance and development tendency of Miao embroidery.

The higher economic level the participants have:

- the more likely they possess machine-made traditional costumes.
- the less likely they use traditional daily costumes in daily life.
- the less likely they use traditional festive costumes in festivals.
- the less mastery level of Miao embroidery they may have.
- the less time they have to practice Miao embroidery.
- the less importance Miao embroidery is for them.
- the more pessimistic towards the inheritance and development tendency of Miao embroidery.

Main reasons for pessimistic opinion of Miao embroidery:

- the traditional functions are gradually losing in contemporary society.
- the machine-made costume has higher price–performance ratio.
- the importance of work and education has surpassed embroidery ability.
- the traditional “mother to daughter” inheritance way has been cut off.
- acculturation by mainstream culture under the influence of media, communication and migrant working.

Main reasons for optimistic opinion of Miao embroidery:

- new ways of transmission are emerging.
- growing awareness of protection from government and intellectual part.
- economic benefits created by arising tourism and commoditization.

Chapter III – Analysis of the Changes of Miao Embroidery

Burns (2002:127) highlights two aspects of cultural transition: "Internal transfer by evolution through invention, guided by needs or by capitalism; external transfer by economic, political influences, external environment and cultures." In the previous chapter, I stated the current situation of Miao embroidery in Chinese society. Comparing the different mastery level and attitudes of participants, it is obvious that Miao embroidery has changed dramatically since the second half of twentieth century.

To trace the path of Miao embroidery, globalization could be a key concept. As Appadurai (1990) pointed out that globalization is multidimensional and these dimensions can be explained as various global flows: flows of people, capital, media, technology, and political ideologies. This chapter analyzes factors that contributed to the changes of Miao embroidery in the era of globalization.

III.1. Political Changes

The richness of Chinese cultural diversity is undeniable. Since most ethnic minorities or marginalized populations live in the country's frontier or geographically peripheral areas, the government has always paid special attention to them, because "the relationship between the state and local ethnic people directly affects internal and external stability" (Herberer 2000). Since the foundation of People's Republic of China in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party adopted Stalin's theory of "nationality". As the base for such system settings and policy enforcement, an official "nationality recognition" campaign and identification of the "nationality status" for each Chinese citizen was required. (Ma, 2006). In the 1950s, the Chinese government established a series of affirmative policies towards non-Han nationalities, such as the recognition of the existence of different ethnic groups, the prohibiting of discrimination, guarantees of special representation in political institutions, special benefits in terms of population policy and university entrance examinations, freedom

to choose ethnic identity, etc. (Sautmann, 1998). These new policies aimed to ensure the rights and interests of minorities, to maintain the equality between different ethnic groups and to rectify the political and economic structure in minority areas.

The intention, on the one hand, was to guarantee a relatively peaceful relationship among Chinese ethnic groups, and the reduction of confrontations, but, on the other hand, made the the degree of political and economic penetration in those areas in a degree that is rather more intrusive than before. Consequently, the traditional costumes lose their function in distinguishing ethnic identity and strengthening unity, which once had played such an important role for people to present themselves as part of a specific group.

Since the dominant political and economic center, represented by the majority Han Chinese, is considered to be the “civilizing center”, it has attempted to transform or “civilize” minority peoples. “The center presumes that its own civilization, based on Chinese Han cultural values, is superior and may take upon itself a so-called noble commitment to uplift peripheral people” (Xu and Salas, 2003). In recent decades, Chinese government has been working constantly to develop the state’s economy and people’s living standards in order to modernize the nation. For this reason, there were several projects to move the Miao from the mountain areas and to settle them in the lowlands. It is known that culture of each society is partly dependent on natural factors such as climate and geographical location. Forcing the Miao people to abandon their environment is, indirectly, making them to give up some of their long lasting political and economic structure as well as cultural traditions.

III.2. Economic Changes

According to Marxism, the economy is the foundation of all human activity, and is, therefore, the basis of society. Before the second half of the twentieth century, the Miao group generally lived in the mountains and the main economic activity was agriculture. Hence, the transmission of cultural aspects such as Miao embroidery maintained an old simple way.

After a period (1956-1966) characterized by repressive domestic policies in China, recent decades have seen great transformations by economic reforms. Since Chinese economic reform in 1978, open-market economy has been gradually established in China. Less developed areas such as the Qiandongnan Region came into contact with the globalization flows.

A salient impact is the industrial manufacturing. The open-market economy started to provide Miao people with chemical dyeing fabrics and yarns, which gradually replaced traditional processes. Merchants and manufacturers recently arrived in the region, soon realized that traditional costumes were a daily necessity for the Miao people and started to produce them in factories. Mass production in assembly line manufacturing increases the efficiency and reduces the need for skilled labor, thus significantly reducing the production costs and, hence, the price. The time-consuming, hand-made processes were not commercially profitable and did not generate income so women embroiderers became factory workers.

Before the 1980s, due to the requirements of the established planned economic system and of the strict household registration system the internal migration flow was kept low. With the loosening (but not the elimination) of the household registration system, large numbers of the rural population have moved to the big cities. The push factors were the low income level, and the emergence of surplus labor force in the rural areas; the pull factors were the higher urban living standards and better overall life prospects in the cities (Hu &

Wu, 2004). In 2015, Guizhou's GDP was listed in the 26th place among the 31 Chinese provinces²³. This high level of poverty has led an increasing number of Miao adult villagers to migrate to urban areas in search of employment. Therefore, the number of women with high mastery level of Miao embroidery are decreasing in the village. At the same time, the traditional "mother to daughter" skills transmission line has been gradually cut off.

²³ 2015 China Regional Economic: <http://mt.sohu.com/20160217/n437615247.shtml>

III.3. Value Changes

Political and economic shifts in great trans-regional systems of interaction “are often accompanied or followed by shifts in the centers of art and their styles.” (Schneider, 1987:436). In the history of Miao groups, the social standards for Miao embroidery were maintained relatively stable for a long time, which was considered as an important measurement of Miao women’s ability and quality. However, with the development of modernization, the penetration of capitalism as well as political policies in this and in other regions of China has impinged on the Chinese minorities’ culture.

Firstly, the influence of the mainstream education. Before the foundation of the People’s Republic of China, most of the Miao communities had no formal education, which means that a great part of Miao people was illiterate. By 1950, among the total number of students in institutions of primary schools, secondary and higher education of ethnic minority origins accounted for only 0.9%, 0.4% and 0.2% respectively. After 1950s, the Chinese government began the literacy campaign and the primary education developed rapidly. The enrollment of minority students reached 10.16 million in 1982, 10 times more than in 1951. By 2002, 98% of school age children in the regions where ethnic minorities predominate had been enrolled in primary school, equal to the national average.²⁴ More and more young Miao girls started to attend schools, which means they do not have enough time to learn Miao embroidery as the past generation did.

What is more, the literacy campaign is based on compulsory national standard curriculum and manual books, which are based, mainly, on the Chinese Han experience. With countrywide unified course contents, syllabuses contain only limited material about the cultures, histories, geographies, literature and arts of the ethnic minorities. That is, the minorities, including the Miao, are exposed to the same type of values, of the Han, as

²⁴Chinese Ministry of Education. 2005, 23 June. *Introduction to Ethnic Minority Education Development*. <http://www.moe.edu.cn/edoas/website18/54/info12054.htm>

everybody else. The lack of representation of ethnic cultural traditions in the school's curriculum prevents minorities' cultural traditions from being carried forwards and gradually dilutes their ethnic identity.

Secondly, the evolution and improvement of communication technologies plays a significant role in value changes. Transportation and information technologies enable the increasing contact between different peoples and cultures. The modern media and technologies that have been widely used in everyday life: newspapers, television, movies, the Internet, and the mobile phone, cutting the distance between remote areas and large cities, between main and minority ethnic groups and between mainstream culture and the peripheral cultures. Miao people started to be involved in the process of globalization in the 1980s. The contact with modern clothes, through communication with other people and images from media and Internet, increased.

The Chinese internal surplus labor mentioned above has also led to significant change on traditional values of the various ethnic groups. The possibility of earning money through wage labor became the new measurement of Miao women's ability, replacing their traditional way of living and affecting their availability to the embroideries. Moreover, the population displacements due to these migratory movements "weaken the ties between culture and place as people move from their traditional homelands to [...] new locales over the course of their lifetime [...] but has also led to reinsertion of culture into new contexts" (Mascia-Lees, 2010:15). For the Miao people who work in economically developed cities, they stopped using traditional costume in order to get better integrated in urban society. When they go back home, they also bring the modern style clothes to their family members. The higher monetary income has increased migrant workers and home communities' desire to acquire modern material goods, which put them drastically on the path of acculturation.

The above factors have mutual interactions and jointly influence the transition process of Miao embroidery.

Chapter IV: Reflections on Authenticity of Miao Embroidery In Contemporary Society

With the irreversible trend of globalization and modernization, it is undeniable that the traditional ethnical culture is suffering from change or abandonment. Through the fieldwork observation and inquiries, nevertheless, some participants put forward three new phenomena relating to Miao embroidery: the awareness of protection from government and the intellectuals; the new ways of transmission; commoditization and arising tourism. These may be important ways to revive the Miao embroidery.

It is necessary to discuss here about the meaning of the “authenticity” of Miao embroidery in modern society. What is an “authentic” piece of Miao embroidery defined and protected by intellectuals and government today? Can the new ways of transmission, tourism and commoditization help to revive the Miao embroidery while maintain this “authenticity”?

IV.1. Definition of Authenticity

The origin of authenticity came from museums, where expert examine “whether objects of art are what they appear to be or are claimed to be, and therefore ...worth the admiration they are being giving”. (Trilling, 1972:93).



Figure 40: Collections of Miao traditional costume in Xijiang Miao Minority Museum: Yu Hongjia

Nowadays, Chinese government and the elites are trying to “save” the vanishing Miao embroidery. They promote ethnical investigations and established ethnographic museums in Miao regions. Currently, there are five ethnographic folk museums in Guizhou Province, and one of them is specifically dedicated to the Miao – Xijiang

Miao Minority Museum. Wen Youming, the curator of Xijiang Miao Minority Museum,

explained that the museum intends to collect more traditional costumes in the next few years. When asked what is the criteria of the collection, he gave some key points: hand-made; representative of the traditional styles and embroidery patterns; historically important; high level of embroidery mastery skills and aesthetic tastes. If a piece of costume meets up with some of these requirements, it would be considered to be added to the collection.

According to Erik Cohen's argument, "Authenticity, for curators and ethnographers, is principally a quality of pre-modern life, and of cultural products produced prior to the penetration of modern Western influences: hence the common emphasis on cultural products which were "hand-made" from "natural" materials." (1988:375) Ethnographers and other researchers, establish strict requirements to consider the embroideries as "authentic", according to these parameters, a "machine-made" Miao costume is excluded from the museum collection because it is not an "authentic" traditional costume.



Figure 41: Family Museum in Ka Wu village: Yu Hongjia

Since 2014, the Guizhou province government and Xijiang Miao Minority Museum have started a "family museum" project in Qiandongnan Region. There are three categories of "family museum" and the valuation includes the quality and quantity of family collections in traditional

costume and family member's mastery level of Miao embroidery. The judges are constituted of museum researchers, folk artists of Miao embroidery and professors of Art History and Ethnology from Guizhou University. In Ka Wu village, there was one family recognized as the first class category in 2015 and awarded 3000 Yuan (400 euros), equivalent more or less to two months' family average income; one family in the second class category and awarded 2000 Yuan (267 euros); three families in the third class category and awarded 1500 Yuan (200 euros).

class category and awarded 2000 Yuan (267 euros); three families in the third class category and awarded 1500 Yuan (200 euros).



Figure 42: Traditional costumes awarded first category by Xijiang Miao Minority Museum²⁵: Huayan

The first category family owns three traditional festive costumes. The grandmother and the mother made their own costumes while the daughter's costume was made by the grandmother (see figure 42). One of the third category families owns six traditional festive costumes due to the high number of family members. One made by the grandmother, two by the mother, two by the daughters and one by the daughter-in-law.

In relation to the quantity, the latter has three pieces more than the first category family but the judges voted the first one as the best owing to the quality of the embroideries. In the local news report²⁶, the judges highlighted the mastery level of the first family grandmother's work because she was able to use more than 14 techniques to embroider representative traditional patterns. They also praised the daughter-in-law of the third category who had made some creative attempts in her works. In the end, they chose the more traditional one as the first category because of its "representativeness".

Jean-Yves Durand suggested that people always consider that the older things have

²⁵ Huayan, (2014) "Family Museum Award Ceremony in Ka Wu village" pp. A4, *Guizhou News*, December 14th

²⁶ See note 25

more legitimacy because the multiple uncertainties of the present make the past a reservoir of precious certainties that we can select, manipulate and model according to our needs. He also claimed that:

“Que critérios devem orientar a definição de normas de certificação? O simples facto de identificar uma produção artesanal ou uma atividade cultural, uma “tradição”, isolá-la e qualificá-la enquanto “património” indica que o seu significado cultural, o seu papel na vida social e económica já mudaram muito. E enquanto uma patrimonilização e uma mercadorização podem permitir a preservação das dimensões materiais e plásticas essenciais de um tipo de artefactos, vão também sempre, em simultâneo, causar a definitiva transformação do seu papel nas redes de relações sociais.” (2006:19)

If we consider that the old Miao embroidery practices are the criteria to legitimize present ones, then only few of the contemporary Miao embroidery would be certified. A simple example is that the main materials are no longer the same as the past. “The cloth traditions depend almost entirely on commercial and factory textiles for their executions. In this context, factory cloth is a resource for, rather than a threat to, indigenous stylistic development.” (Schneider, 1987:440) Besides, embroiders’ aesthetic tastes are always changing. In this context, Erik Cohen suggested that “authenticity” is a socially constructed concept and its social (as against philosophical) connotation is not given, but “negotiable”. (1988:4) This is a crucial point when we discuss the current condition of Miao embroidery and its future development.

IV.2. New Ways of Transmission

In the past, the embroidery skills were mainly passed from mother, or other close female relatives, to the younger generations. Nowadays, this transmission line has been gradually cut off. The Miao embroidery is now depending on the new ways of transmission, such as apprenticeship, educational institutions or handicraft cooperatives.

During fieldwork, two participants (26 and 32 years old, respectively) said that they learned Miao embroidery from an experienced master in Xuan Wei town. The apprenticeship study lasted for 2 years and the master taught them more than 10 techniques and the traditional knowledge of Miao embroidery. Now they are working for the middle to high-end Miao embroidery market, dedicated to hand-made products. Another 7 participants (aged between 16-33 years old) attended 3 or 6 months Miao embroidery courses in Kaili Jigong College, whose focus is teaching “practical and employable skills”.²⁷ They learnt how to do the embroidery with machine. The college provides students with internships and sometimes employment, mainly in the industrial area.

The transmission progress in the apprenticeship is similar to the traditional mother-daughter line, based on hand-made techniques. The disadvantage is that it is still heavily dependent on direct one-on-one teaching, which is painstaking and time-consuming. The advantage is that the precious hand-made experience can be passed on from the old to young generation, even if the traditional way is no longer available. Middle to high-end markets are the main targets. As a traditional cultural icon, Miao embroidery has inspired many fashion designers to create new products. Luxurious brands like Hermes and Valentino used Miao embroidery in their products. The fusion of contemporary fashion and ancient Miao embroidery created new aesthetics.

Unlike the old transmission method, whose goal was to teach the next generation to

²⁷ Kaili Jigong College is a vocational school in Kaili city. The main courses include computer science, mechanics, pre-school teacher training, ethnic culture, etc. Source: <http://www.86jixiao.com/qiandongnan/43893.html>

make their own costume within the household, the apprenticeship, relies on a different learning process and targets the market, especially the elites. Learning these skills in educational institutions, have similar goals — earning money by selling in the lower end of the market. For the majority of the Miao people, the economic benefits are more attractive in today's society. Even the "Family Museum" we mentioned above sets up monetary awards to draw public attention.

Following the elites' logic, the Miao embroidery "should be created for a traditional purpose by a traditional artist, with conforming to traditional forms" (Cornet 1975:52), the new ways of transmission are definitely not to be considered as "qualified". The "qualified" transmission is rare nowadays. In the past, there were no educational institutions for Miao embroidery because those skills and their transmission were a preserve of the household knowledge, therefore there was no need for specialized schools. But today, the "authentic" hand-made embroidery is too laborious and too expensive to be commercially profitable. The machine-made embroidery is much cheaper and more affordable to the majority. If we stick to the traditional transmission line, then the "authentic" Miao embroidery no longer exists. Thus, regarding the new ways of transmission, it is worthwhile reaffirming Erik Cohen's point of view: the "authenticity" is negotiable.

IV.3. Tourism

Tourism has proved to be one the most powerful economic, social, cultural, and political forces in today's society. Due to the significance of tourism, communities throughout China have welcomed it as an instrument for economic development. Xijiang, one of the biggest Miao villages in Guizhou province, is a good example. In 2014, Xijiang village received 272.56 million domestic and international tourists and the annual tourism income was 21.36 billion Yuan (2.88 billion euros).²⁸

Rituals, ceremonies, costumes, and folk arts may all be subjected to commoditization in tourism. In Xijiang village, the Miao embroidery plays two main roles: touristic souvenirs and traditional costumes used by local people in festivals. In the touristic market, only a few of the Miao embroidery souvenirs are hand-made and the price is much higher than the machine-made. To meet the rising demand, many embroidery souvenirs are, inevitably, manufactured in quantity. The festival activities and ceremonies today attract a lot of tourists and spectators, became performance shows. Thus, in the tourism literature, the commoditization of "authenticity" and performance arises controversy.

Greenwood claimed that once an authentic cultural product becomes a cultural commodity, the meaning is gone. (1977:135) McLeod (1999) emphasized the absence of modernity as a basic judgment of authentic for it is relevant to tradition, local, primitive. Boorstin also agreed that the process of commoditization will affect the cultural products, as they become increasingly oriented to an external public. "Rituals may be shortened, embellished, or otherwise adopted to the tastes of the tourists." (1964:103). MacCannell suggested "staged authenticity" to conclude the obviously inauthentic experience. (1973).

From another perspective, Cohen proposed "emergent authenticity" to replace the museum-related authenticity:

²⁸ http://www.gz.xinhuanet.com/2015-08/06/c_1116171522.htm

"A new cultural product, although changed through commoditization, acquire a new meaning for its producers. Thus, what used to be a religiously meaningful ritual for an internal public, may become a culturally significant self-representation before an external public. Moreover, the two kinds of meanings are not necessarily mutually exclusive but could be additive: new meanings may be added to old ones, which persevere into the new situation. "(1988:382)

Cohen also points out that the commoditization often hits a culture not when it is flourishing, but when it is already in decline. Indeed, for the Miao people, the participation in the growing ethnic craft tourist economy does not reflect their desire to maintain a mythical "pre-modern" way of life; nor is it inspired by a need to resist capitalist homogenization. Instead, it is driven by an acute pressure for economic survival. In some way, tourism frequently facilitates the preservation of a cultural tradition which would otherwise perish. Although the number real hand-made embroidery is less than machine-made one, the growing number of upper class tourists are seeking for more authentic and prefer the costly hand-made version, stimulating an expansion of handwork.

Moreover, Xijiang village maintains the traditional celebrations of important festivals in such a big scale that many Miao villagers nearby will also participate. It is a concentrated expression of ethnical culture, on which the Miao people show their positive state of mind, praying for peace, prosperity and reunion, greatly enhancing the cohesion and solidarity of the groups while the participation of tourists, does not necessarily spoil the traditional meanings of the performance. According to McKean (1976), the presence of tourists is appreciated for the economic benefits it brings, but it does not diminish the importance of performing for villagers. Besides, the need of tourism enriches the possibility that the indigenous performances will be done with more elegance, in effect conserving culture.

Cohen also claimed that, to the external observer, the commoditization may seem to involve a transformation of meaning. However, in many circumstances, "the performers

themselves do not necessarily perceive that such a transformation had in fact occurred. Rather, despite the changed context, they may perceive an often astonishing degree of continuity between the old and the new situation.” (1988:382).

In summary, the awareness of protection, the new ways of transmission and commoditization of Miao embroidery are important ways to preserve and revive Miao embroidery in contemporary society while the authenticity of Miao embroidery is negotiable. As Appadurai suggested, commodities, like persons, have social life. “We have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories. It is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context.” (1994:5).

Conclusion

T.M. Abraham (2009) once claimed that the world of handicrafts, like art, gives us a glimpse into the core and kernel of the collective mind and societies through the mirror of the mind of the individual that created them. Miao embroidery, as an important part of the Miao folk heritage, is a unique expression of its history and culture and embodies the diligence and wisdom of Miao women. This work is intended to investigate the changes in Miao embroidery since second half to twentieth century.

Firstly, I studied the historic development and characteristics of Miao embroidery, which covers the materials, colors, techniques, differences between festive and daily costume, and cultural connotations of traditional patterns. Also, I probed the cultural functions of Miao embroidery, laying a foundation for further investigation.

Then, I chose Ka Wu village as fieldwork location to study the current situation of Miao embroidery. The observations and questionnaire / interview results show that Miao embroidery today is indeed in decline. The possession of costumes and the frequency of utilization are proportional to age and have reduced dramatically in the younger generation. The mastery level is also proportional to age but inversely proportional to educational and economic level.

Various factors can account for this phenomenon, including economical, political and cultural changes under the influence of globalization. Since the economic reforms in the 1980s, China has gradually increased the level of industrialization to mass produce goods for domestic consumption and to the international market. Hand made costumes became part of the industrial logic and the manufactured items replaced the hand-made works bothe for convenience and low cost. Miao people have a wider choice of and broader access to modern dress, both materially and financially. Ethnic policies and national education campaigns since 1950s, as well as new emerging communication technologies in recent

decades, have made the Miao groups more integrated into the mainstream society. Consequently, the traditional heritage items, such as Miao embroideries and costumes, lost their original functions and importance in contemporary society. In this context, a great part of the participants holds a pessimistic view towards the prospects of the preservation of their heritage and the tendencies for the future development of Miao embroidery.

Meanwhile, a small part of Miao people is still optimistic owing to the new ways of transmission, awareness of protection sponsored by some educated elites and the emerging tourism, which are considered as important ways to revive this ancient heritage. It is worthwhile discussing about the authenticity of Miao embroidery to have a better understanding of its future development.

By the elite's strict definition, only few of today's hand-made Miao embroidery could be classified as authentic work and, according to this tendency, this art is on the verge of extinction. To answer such urgent reality, Cohen (1988) suggested a negotiable authenticity. Under this circumstance, new ways of transmission such as apprenticeship can be considered as a negotiable "authentic" way, for it maintains a great part of the tradition. The hand-made embroidery souvenirs and the Miao costumes used in festival performances can also be seen as a kind of negotiable "authentic" commodity because tourism and commoditization do not necessarily destroy the meaning of this tradition. Besides, the increasing demand for handicrafts and tourism has encouraged some younger generations to learn and to use this Miao embroidery. What used to be done for pleasure after daily farming chores, has now brought a reasonable income to local women, contributing to the continuity of this tradition.

At the same time, we cannot deny the importance of machine-based skill learning or machine-made embroidery products, although they may seem to be less "authentic" in some way. We should recognize that few communities would reject the technological changes and return to the traditional pattern of life nowadays, especially because the ways

of life brought about new pattern of consumption and an increase in the resources required to meet their needs.

Globalization involves a wide range of contradictions, providing both opportunities and threats to the Miao. The biggest challenge is how to embrace the globalized world without losing its particularity. As Miao embroidery becomes commoditized, it is important to reevaluate the definition of cultural preservation and authenticity and study continuously the relationship between tradition and innovation.

I would like to finish this work by a sentence of Daniel Miller: “We cannot know who we are, or become what we are, except by looking in a material mirror, which is the historical world created by those who lived before us and confronts us as material culture, and that continues to evolve through us.” (2005:7).

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Annex: Questionnaire

- For every question please indicate your answer by drawing a circle or a tick mark, or fill in the _____ with the appropriate content.
- Unless there is special instruction, you should only choose one answer for every question. Questions requesting more than one answer will be marked after the title.

1. What is your age?

- ☐ Under 15 years old
- ☐ 15-25 years old
- ☐ 25-35 years old
- ☐ 35-45 years old
- ☐ 45-55 years old
- ☐ 55-65 years old
- ☐ Over 65 years old

2. What is your education level?

- ☐ Illiterate
- ☐ Primary School
- ☐ Secondary School
- ☐ High School
- ☐ University
- ☐ Others

3. How much is your family's annual income?

- ☐ Under 18,000 Yuan
- ☐ 18,000 – 24,000 Yuan
- ☐ 24,000 – 30,000 Yuan
- ☐ Over 30,000 Yuan

4. Do you have your own traditional costumes?

- ☐ Yes (go to question 5)
- ☐ No (go to question 8)

5. Is it hand-made by family members or bought from markets?

- ☐ Hand-made by family members
- ☐ Bought from markets

6. Do you wear traditional daily costume in your daily life?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

7. Do you wear traditional festive costume in festivals?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

8. What is your embroidery mastery level?

- ☐ Insufficient: Know less than 3 techniques and practice rarely (if know nothing, go to the question 13)
- ☐ Sufficient: Know 3-5 techniques and practice occasionally
- ☐ Good: Know 5-8 techniques and practice often
- ☐ Very Good: Know more than 8 techniques and practice constantly

9. When did you start to learn Miao embroidery?

- ☐ Under 15 years old
- ☐ 15-25 years old
- ☐ 25-35 years old
- ☐ 35-45 years old
- ☐ 45-55 years old
- ☐ Over 55 years old

10. How did you acquire Miao embroidery techniques?

- ☐ From mother or female relatives
- ☐ From peer or friends
- ☐ From experienced master
- ☐ From school or professional institutions
- ☐ Others _____

11. Did you have innovative design during practice?

- ☐ Yes (go to question 12)
- ☐ No (go to question 13)

12. What are the innovative contents?

- ☐ Cartoon figures
- ☐ Mandarin characters
- ☐ Non-traditional geometric patterns
- ☐ Non-traditional plant and animal patterns
- ☐ Others _____

13. What do you think Miao embroidery have brought you? (Choose all applicable)

- ☐ Ethnical identity
- ☐ Income
- ☐ Joy
- ☐ Social Status
- ☐ Respect
- ☐ Nothing

☐ Other _____

14. Do you think Miao embroidery is important for you?

- ☐ Great importance
- ☐ Big importance
- ☐ A little importance
- ☐ No importance

15. Do you think the Miao embroidery is facing an inheritance crisis? Why?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

16. What you think of the development tendency of Miao? Why?

- ☐ Positive. There is much room for development
- ☐ Neutral. There is some room for development
- ☐ Negative. There is no room for development
- ☐ Hard to say

This survey has concluded, thank you again for your participation! If you have any comments or suggestions, please write them below:
